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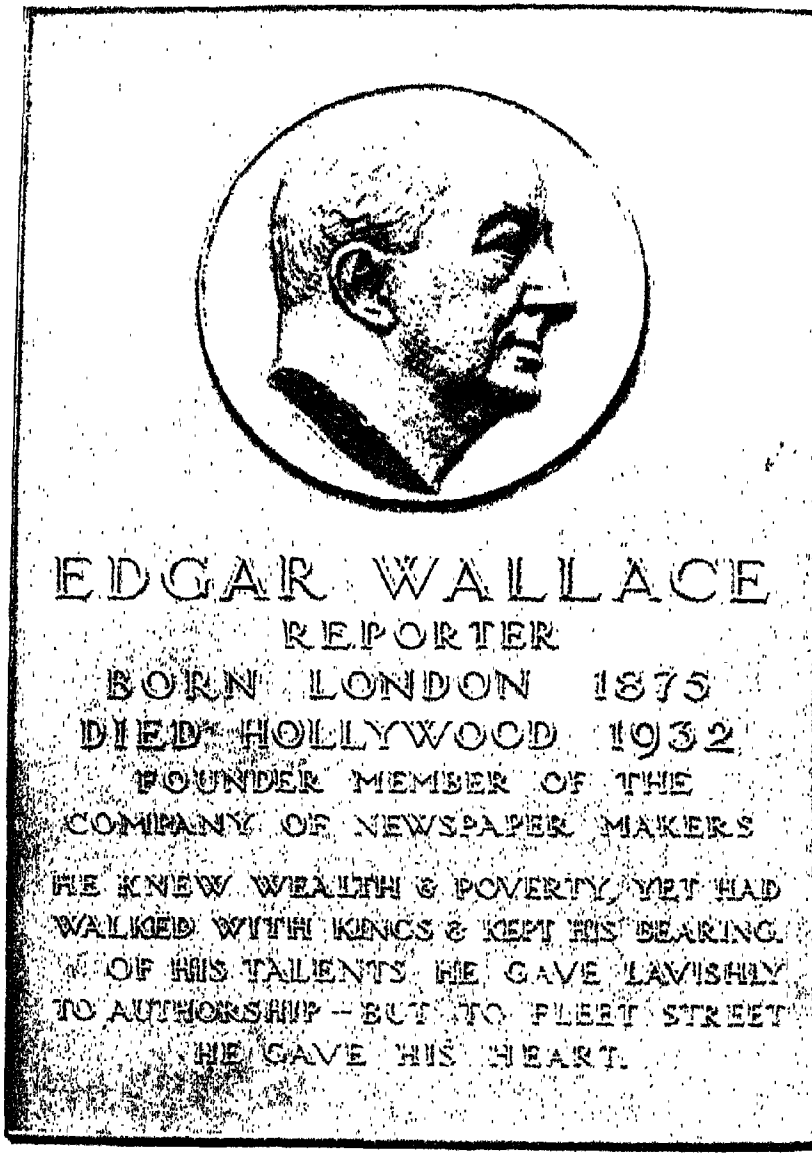
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EDGAR WALLACE

A BIOGRAPHY

ALSO BY
MARGARET LANE

FAITH, HOPE, NO CHARITY
AT LAST THE ISLAND


EDGAR WALLACE
REPORTER
BORN LONDON 1875
DIED HOLLYWOOD 1932
FOUNDER MEMBER OF THE
COMPANY OF NEWSPAPER MAKERS
HE KNEW WEALTH & POVERTY, YET HAD
WALKED WITH KINGS & KEPT HIS BEARING.
OF HIS TALENTS HE GAVE LAVISHLY
TO AUTHORSHIP – BUT TO FLEET STREET
HE GAVE HIS HEART.

The plaque put up to the memory of Edgar Wallace at Ludgate Circus, over the spot where he sold newspapers as a boy.

EDGAR WALLACE

THE BIOGRAPHY OF A PHENOMENON

By

MARGARET LANE



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TO

BRYAN

whose sympathetic collaboration at all times
made possible the writing of this book.

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M. L.

CONTENTS

PART I

THE BOY

Chap.		*Page*
I.	Polly Richards's Lying-In	3
II.	The Freemans	18
III.	Dick Goes To Work	36
IV.	The Milk Round and First Love	47

PART II

THE TOMMY

I.	The Recruit	63
II.	The Caldecotts	73
III.	The Soldier Poet	93

PART III

THE REPORTER

I.	"My Pal, The Boer"	113
II.	The House That Harmsworth Built	161
III.	"Sanders Of The River"	216
IV.	Hail and Farewell	249
V.	Winding Up The Machine	268

PART IV

THE PHENOMENON

I.	Money and Power	319
II.	The Machine Breaks Down	376
APPENDIX		414
INDEX		417

ILLUSTRATIONS

The Plaque put up to the memory of Edgar Wallace at Ludgate Circus *frontispiece*
Polly Richards about 1880 *facing page* 8
Polly Richards with Grace and Adeline Edgar: about 1874 8
Miss Marriott's favourite photograph of Polly Richards 9
Miss Marriott 16
Josephine Richards: "Joey" 16
Richard Horatio Edgar 17
Richard Horatio Edgar in a character part 17
Mrs. Freeman 20
George Freeman 21
On the milk round with Harry Hanford 44
Edie Cockle 44-5
Jenny Taylor 44-5
Harry Hanford 44-5
Simonstown: seated, the frugal Sergeant Pinder 76
The Rev. W. S. Caldecott 77
Mrs. Caldecott: Edgar's "Dearest Madam" 77
Ivy: when Edgar first met her 92
From Edgar Wallace's diary, dated March 11th, 1898 92-93
The soldier poet: at the Caldecott's house 93
Medical Staff Corps orderly: 1897 100
Reuter's war correspondent 116
The first frock coat: Dewsbury, 1900 117
"And all I can say is in the *Daily Mail* next day!" 132
Daily Mail war correspondent: 1900 133
Editor of the *Rand Daily Mail*, Johannesburg 148

facing page

Miss Emma Hutchinson's touring company 164
Covering Cowes Week as a reporter: 1906 196
Edgar, Ivy and Bryan: at Tressillian Crescent 212
Leading in the winner of the *Edgar Wallace Handicap*: Agua Caliente 229
Ivy: 1913 252
Pat and Bryan: 1913 252–3
Edgar in 1914 252–3
Jim 260
The photograph known to the world 261
"His requirements for a day's work were a comfortable swivel chair, a large desk or table, his dressing-gown, cigarettes, and an unlimited supply of tea 276
Dictating to Bob Curtis 277
A visit to the State prison in Chicago, just before *On the Spot* 340
Chalklands, Bourne End. Jim, Edgar, Michael and Bryan 356
At British Lion Studios: with Edna Best, Herbert Marshall and T. Hayes Hunter during the filming of *The Calendar* 357
In the Pullman, on his way to Blackpool 380
Electioneering for Mr. Lloyd George 381
Jim and Penelope 396
" . . . that slight lifting of the eyelids which could be so formidable . . ." 396–7
Chalklands, Bourne End: "He would shut himself up in his study . . ." 396–7
"The heavy glass screen which surrounded his desk was really little less than a three-sided cabin" 397
Hollywood: working on a scenario 404

Part One

THE BOY

CHAPTER I

Polly Richards's Lying-In

GREENWICH in the 'seventies, before Blackwall Tunnel and improved railway services had linked it in suburban security to London, still possessed much of the sturdy seafaring flavour of an independent port and maritime town. Its bow-fronted houses and crooked chimneys faced on a river busy with foreign shipping, its wharves were noisy with commerce that nowadays for the most part stops short at Gravesend or Tilbury, or passes by Greenwich Pier at full tide on its way to the Pool.

A horse-ferry, subject to wind and stream, carried what road traffic there was between the south bank of the river and the Isle of Dogs, and sailors tramped over the muddy shingle at low tide between public-houses that kept their own watermen's boats moored to the wooden stairways leading down to the beach.

There were few houses in that maze of wharfside streets and narrow alleys that could claim no relationship with the sea. Model ships, lovingly constructed and marvellously enclosed in thick greenish bottles, hung in the small-paned windows of front parlours, and many door-steps were kept whitened, brass knockers polished and window-sills ornamented with shells in a way that had more to do with the decent pride of a seaport town than with the slowly encroaching griminess of south London.

Sole rival, in the way of entertainment, to the numberless public-houses along the beach, the old Greenwich Theatre turned a none too well-kept plaster face to London Street,

next door to the Portland Arms. (To-day there is no trace of that florid Victorian façade, the stone stairs and gas-lit passages, the cracked gilt ornament of the boxes and festooned and faded wallpaper of the bar, nothing more evocative of its forgotten melodramas than a builder's hoarding, unreticently scrawled on by the youth of the neighbourhood and screening the derelict site from the main road; but in the 'seventies the meatier tragedies of Shakespeare and the villainy-and-innocence school of drama occupied the little stage by turns, so that what the Old Greenwich lacked in tone it made up in popular favour, sacrificing refinement to a crowded gallery and the additional profits from the sale of meat pies, oranges and beer.)

It was from the stage door of this unpretentious place of entertainment that Marie Richards (or Polly, as she was known to the other members of the company) let herself out one December night of 1874 and walked home to the lodging-house in Ashburnham Grove, to await--with little enough enthusiasm, with anguish, even---the birth of her second child.

Her situation was a wretched one. She was too far gone in pregnancy to hope for another engagement for at least four months, even supposing that the confinement should go off without mishap, and she herself be well enough to go back to work when the child was a month old. This in itself was sufficient to depress her, for Polly's life had been a hard one, and beyond the small weekly wage that she earned in the theatre there was not a penny she could rely on for the support of herself and her daughter; but this was not the only thing that made her six months' heaviness a burden. The child was unwanted, a bastard; the result of a brief and secret liaison which threatened to be her undoing, and which even then she bitterly regretted. And the circumstances of its begetting were such that her own pride and decency made her determine (with superhuman strength of resolution, and after what bitter

indecisions and heart-searchings we shall never know) that the birth, the very existence of the child must be kept secret. Faced with the knowledge that she was to bear a child which she must never own, she resolved to confide in no one, not even in her dearest friends. Not even in the benefactress to whom she owed her livelihood. Not even in her lover.

Who Polly Richards was, or where she came from, it seems impossible at a distance of more than sixty years to discover. All that is known of her origins is that she was born in 1843, possibly of a small theatrical family, almost certainly in humble circumstances, and that her maiden name was Mary Jane Blair. In her early twenties, after a few years of provincial small-part acting and dancing (one or two people can still remember early daguerreotypes of Polly in a ballet skirt, with roses in her hair), she married a merchant-service skipper and became Mrs. Richards. Unhappily, on his first voyage after the marriage, Captain Richards died of an obscure malady at sea, leaving her a widow, without means, and pregnant.

In the course of a few months she gave birth to a daughter, and as soon as she was able went back to her old work in the provincial theatres, keeping the name of Richards for professional purposes, but improving the slightly pedestrian Mary to Marie. How she weathered those first years of widowhood, living precariously on the fringes of the theatre, depositing her baby first with one lodging-house keeper and then another while she worked, one can only guess; but with no beauty and no outstanding talent to recommend her she must have had a tedious and embittering struggle. Irregular work, low wages, poor lodgings, second-hand clothing and insufficient meals seem to have been the best that she could hope for, for when the celebrated Miss Alice Marriott came across Polly Richards in Liverpool she had reached the lowest ebb of disillusion and poverty, and was almost starving. Without work and almost without hope, she was lodging with her child in a poor cottage

behind the public-house next door to the Theatre Royal where Miss Marriott's company was playing, and the older woman, with an impulsiveness and generosity entirely characteristic, took her off at once to her own lodgings and gave her work.

Generous and good-natured though she undoubtedly was, Miss Marriott was also a shrewd and intelligent woman, and one cannot suppose that in this she acted only out of blind charity; she seems, indeed, to have been genuinely attracted by the character and personality of Polly Richards.

Polly was then twenty-nine, and the few photographs that remain of her show her to have been a rather plain young woman with strong heavy eyebrows and a curled fringe, and more than a hint of sardonic humour about the eyes and mouth. She was not tall, and can never have been (except in her early days, when she played soubrette parts and danced a little) particularly slender, but she carried herself well, and her expression, though reserved, was pleasing. She had, too, in spite of her vicissitudes, a gift of good-natured pleasantry which was endearing.

Miss Marriott's favourite photograph of Polly, which she kept in a leather-bound album to the day of her death, was taken during the first two years of their association, and shows her leaning gingerly on one of those ornate, tasselled and upholstered pieces of furniture which seem to have had no existence outside the salons of Victorian photographers. She is wearing a stuff dress with a tight-fitting braided bodice and bustle, and leans with one hand resting lightly on the opulent buttoned curves of the upholstery, the other thrust nonchalantly into an elaborate pocket. From under the strong arched eyebrows and heavy lids which she was to pass on to her son she gazes at the photographer with an air of polite but disconcerting scepticism.

In Miss Marriott's company she combined the duties of small-part actress with those of dresser, and from time to time

had complete charge of the tragedienne's wardrobe. She pressed and mended Lady Macbeth's draperies, learned how to arrange the romantic tattered plaid of Jeanie Deans, and helped Miss Marriott into the doublet and hose of her famous female Hamlet. She made close friends with Miss Marriott's two grown-up daughters, Grace and Adeline, and before long the three young women were being photographed as a trio, twined together in elegant and affectionate attitudes. Adeline, who at over eighty still has a lively recollection of her, remembers Polly less for her talent than for her good humour—a young woman who, for all her sardonic reserve of manner, somehow contrived to be the life and soul of dressing-room parties, keeping them all in a roar with funny and improbable stories which she told with a disarming air of gravity and truth, watching her audience from under heavy eyelids, her face impassive. She made friends, too, though as it turned out, less innocently, with Miss Marriott's only son, Richard Edgar, who had been burdened with the additional name of Horatio as a result of his mother's partiality for Hamlet.

We should perhaps at this point take a rather closer view of Miss Marriott, since (though she never knew it) she became the grandmother of Polly Richards's famous son. She was a dominant, almost a masculine woman, with a magnificent presence and very considerable talent. Her greatest assets as an actress were her beautiful voice and her phenomenal memory, which enabled her to play for over forty years an enormous repertoire of long and difficult parts; but she possessed as well a remarkable degree of dramatic intensity, and enjoyed a respectable reputation as an emotional actress.

Her fondness for masculine doublet and hose was perhaps not quite so strange as might appear in such a typical mid-Victorian as Alice Marriott, for in the favourite tragedies of her day the fattest and most prestigious parts were written for men. She had seen Macready and Charles Kean, and felt (apparently not

entirely without justification) that she could do almost as well, given the same opportunities. As she was mistress of her own company and something of an autocrat, it is not surprising that in this matter, as in many others, Miss Marriott pleased herself, and it is for her Hamlet rather than for some of her more conventional parts that she is chiefly remembered.

She played Hamlet with success at intervals for many years, at Sadler's Wells, the old Surrey, the Standard (Shoreditch), at Marylebone, and again in the 'seventies when she went for a tour in America. After seeing her in the part several times and comparing her performance with those of many actors over a long period the late H. Chance Newton was able to write: "I make no hesitation in saying that this brilliant actress's presentation of the part gradually came out as one of the very best I have ever seen." It is possible that to-day one would be more likely to agree with the contemporary critic who wrote: "It would be untrue to assert that the Hamlet of Miss Marriott carried much sense of illusion, but her rich, rolling voice and beautiful elocution almost compensated for the spectacle of a well-developed Dane in black cloak and trunks"; but however she may have fallen below the ideal it seems certain that Miss Marriott's Hamlet was a spirited and courageous effort. For many years the combination of her own talents and the novelty of a female Hamlet made her, at all events, a very comfortable sum of money, which would have contributed largely to the ease of her old age if her husband, Robert Edgar, had not persistently indulged his passion for speculation, in particular his fondness for buying up rows of shop property at a fancy price and selling them immediately at a loss.

It is entirely typical of the woman that she should not only have attempted but made a success of such a part, for she had a man's energy and a most unfeminine determination. Running her own company, sometimes her own theatre as well (she was lessee of Sadler's Wells and the Standard, Shoreditch, for



Polly Richards,
about 1880.



Polly Richards
with Grace
and Adeline
Edgar, about 1874.



Miss Marriott's favourite photograph of Polly Richards

several years) there was not a detail of production that was allowed to escape her, and though her handsome but fatigued husband was dignified with the title of manager it was Miss Marriott who performed all the offices that should have been his, even to counting out the wages of the company with her own hands every Saturday. It was she who took the decisions, chose the plays, engaged the players, transacted all the business and conducted rehearsals. Her son and her two daughters were in the company with her, and later on the son's wife and the daughters' husbands; but her family no less than other members of the troupe were made to bear the brunt of her enormous appetite for work and feel the rigour of her matriarch's discipline.

Playing a fortnight in one theatre and a week in another, travelling sometimes fourteen hours a day between towns in the uncomfortable unheated railway trains of the 'fifties and 'sixties, she worked regularly for fifty weeks in the year, and was never known to be defeated even by illness. When one considers the length and difficulty of the parts she played, the responsibilities she shouldered, the discomfort of the interminable succession of theatrical lodgings, her vitality and her output become nothing short of prodigious. In one week in 1861 under the direction of J. A. Cave at the Marylebone she played on six successive nights Romeo, Meg Merrilies, Rosalind, Hamlet, Bianca and Mrs. Haller (the last a part made famous by Mrs. Siddons) and in such a week of exhausting changes saw nothing unusual. She was never known to forget a line, never appeared to need to refresh her memory. She could turn from Romeo to Rosalind, from Hamlet to Jeanie Deans, from the Duchess of Malfi to *East Lynne* without a tremor, and she carried her company and her family along on the impetus of her own inexhaustible vitality. When on Christmas night, 1900, she died suddenly in her seventy-seventh year, it was after no gentle period of invalidism and retirement, but still working,

with her boots on. She collapsed quietly after a set of charades at a family party, and when they carried her upstairs her daughter found open beside her bed the marked copy of the new part she was learning—Juliet's nurse, one of the few Shakespearean parts she had never attempted.

Undertaking the rescue of Polly Richards with the same dominating thoroughness which she brought to bear on her own work and the running of her family, one of the first things which Miss Marriott did for Polly was to try and relieve her of the responsibility of her six-year-old daughter, Josephine. Josephine Richards, nicknamed Joey, was turning out to be an attractive and talented child, with a strong facial resemblance to her mother, but the difficulties of bringing her up in the midst of this precarious theatrical life, always working and never in one place for more than a few months at a time, seem to have disheartened Polly, and after some discussion she reluctantly agreed to Miss Marriott's suggestion that the child should be put into the Sailors' Infant Orphan Asylum at Snaresbrook. Accordingly, Miss Marriott wrote to a number of interested persons, soliciting their recommendation of Josephine Richards for the next vacancy, and within a few months Joey was taken down to Snaresbrook by her mother and buttoned into the unyielding uniform of a sailor's infant orphan.

Joey, however, did not take kindly to the orphanage, and incurred the displeasure of the authorities by having increasing fits of homesickness, and refusing to eat. Her health suffered so seriously in the first six months that the superintendent became alarmed, and asked the asylum doctor for his opinion. The result of his examination was that Mrs. Richards received a tart note asking her to remove Josephine, as the child's obstinacy was such that no pressure of discipline could induce her to eat the wholesome food provided for the orphans, or check her in her insubordinate intention of fretting herself to death. On her first available free afternoon Polly travelled down to

Snaresbrook by train and brought Joey back with her to the theatre.

From then on, whenever a child was required in the cast of any of Miss Marriott's productions, Joey was allowed to appear, and became a professional asset to her mother rather than an encumbrance. She played page boys and younger sons, touching little Lord Fauntleroys and angelic children lisping moral precepts to the confusion of villainy, particularly distinguishing herself in the part of Little Willy in *East Lynne*. A profound affection, lasting undisturbed until Joey's untimely death at the age of twenty-five, began at this time to develop between mother and daughter; but although Polly had become perfectly reconciled to the responsibility of one child she confided to Miss Marriott's daughters that she was glad she was never likely to have another. This was just three years before her second pregnancy, nearly four before the birth of her remarkable son, the boy whose name in another fifty years was to achieve such fame that even Miss Marriott is chiefly memorable to-day for the qualities of mind and character which she handed down to him.

Miss Marriott herself, though in some ways a not particularly feminine woman, was devoted to her three children, and displayed a jealous affection for her only son. A handsome young man in his middle twenties, he had inherited a certain amount of his mother's talent but singularly little (in his young days, at least) of her steady and resolute character. He was good-looking, irresponsible, over-gallant, and it occasioned Miss Marriott some anxiety that he showed no signs of marrying and settling down. He did, it is true, take a good deal of the theatrical business off her hands as he grew older, and he was an asset to the company as a clever character actor with a shrewd turn of humour, but it would have pleased Miss Marriott better if he had chosen a sensible wife from among the many young women who found him attractive, and set about

the serious business of providing her with grandchildren. Instead, he seemed content to enjoy himself and his own modest triumphs in the theatre (he was particularly successful as John Dumbie, Laird of Dumbiedikes, playing opposite his mother's Jeanie Deans in *The Heart of Midlothian*) and his undoubted popularity with the female members of the company.

Her wish that Richard would marry and settle down seems often to have been the subject of Miss Marriott's dressing-room conversations with her daughters and Polly Richards, and she was pleased when, in the autumn of 1873, Polly, who had been having one of her occasional spells of work away from Miss Marriott's company, announced that she had made friends in Dundee with a charming young actress called Jenny Taylor, and, since she was just the thing for Richard, had more than half a mind to introduce her to the family.

A meeting was arranged, and Polly brought Jenny round for Miss Marriott's inspection. She proved to be an appealing little thing with large soft eyes, a gentle face and manner, and a quantity of extremely fair hair plaited in a heavy coronet round the back of her head. Miss Marriott took a fancy to her at once, and Richard Edgar himself was not unimpressed. Polly congratulated herself on the success of her manœuvre, and before long Jenny Taylor found herself enlisted as a regular member of Miss Marriott's company.

With everything going so smoothly, so obviously for the best, it is difficult to imagine what fit of recklessness betrayed Polly herself into brief intimacy with the attractive Richard, but the fact remains that she allowed herself to drift temporarily into a love affair with him (if one can give so romantic a name to a relationship which seems to have had so little passion, so little affection in it) and in the summer of 1874, just about the time when Richard and Jenny were receiving Miss Marriott's approval and blessing on their engagement, she was dismayed to discover that she was pregnant. Frightened and secretive,

telling no one, not even Richard, what had happened, Polly made a sudden break with Miss Marriott's company and went off by herself for a season at the Greenwich Theatre.

The extraordinary secrecy which she preserved (and she kept silence staunchly until twelve years later, when Joey at nineteen became engaged, and Polly thought it dishonest that her betrothed should not be told of the existence of an illegitimate half-brother living in Deptford) shows her to have been a woman of no ordinary character. It would have been so easy to shame Richard, to ruin Jenny's happiness, to make a profitable bargain out of Miss Marriott's generosity and sense of justice. It would have been so easy to weep and protest, to denounce and make scenes, to reveal for her own benefit the bad behaviour which Richard had so cheerfully forgotten. Yet Polly did none of these things. She might, indeed, at the expense of these people whose happiness she valued, have escaped much future misery by making a clean breast of it; Miss Marriott, after her first anger and dismay, would certainly have wished to provide for Richard's son, and it is possible, since she was a warm-hearted woman, that her anger against Polly herself would not have been lasting. How Jenny and Richard might have fared together after the revelation one cannot guess, but Polly at least would have been able to keep the child, and would have been spared the humiliation her son inflicted on her in her old age, when she made herself known to him in London, and he closed his door to her in bitterness, unable to forgive what all his life he believed to have been a callous and irresponsible abandonment.

That, however, was still nearly thirty years away, and Polly in her distress and self-reproach had no idea of the nature of the child she carried, no prevision of the man he would become. Nor could she foresee her own wretched end, penniless and alone and ill, in the infirmary at Bradford, with no child (since Joey died young) to comfort her last moments or to bury her.

All she knew was that by her own fault and Richard's she was in a sorry predicament, and the best thing she could do for everybody concerned, herself included, was to hold her tongue.

She must have turned the wretched circumstances over and over in her mind a thousand times in those first weeks in Greenwich, walking daily between the theatre and the cheap lodgings she found for herself in Ashburnham Grove, and only the strongest conviction that she was acting for the best can have given her the courage to act as few women would have done in her situation. Miss Marriott, as awe-inspiring as she was kind, was her benefactress and employer, and Polly's future, as well as Joey's, depended on her interest and favour. Richard, with whom Polly had been guilty of so lamentable an indiscretion, was her only son, her favourite child, the darling of her hopes. Added to this, Jenny Taylor was Polly's friend, happy in the prospect of a marriage which Polly's own contriving had brought about. Polly cannot even have had much hope (nor, perhaps, any wish) that a sudden revelation might induce Richard to marry her, for the intimacy seems to have been, to him at least, as insignificant as it was brief, and by the time she knew that she was carrying his child his affection was centred exclusively on Jenny.

Considering these things, Polly kept her own counsel, and threw herself into work with fierce energy. She played in *Let Us Never Despair*, *Coriolanus*, *The Stolen Jewess*, *Sunshine Through the Clouds*, *The Double Marriage*, *Woman and Her Master*, and *The Towers of Notre Dame* at the Greenwich Theatre in the course of the next few months, relinquishing the struggle only a few days before Christmas, when her condition had become too noticeable. She spent the next three months without work, sitting in her lodgings, wandering about Greenwich, waiting.

Joey does not appear to have been with her at this time, and it is probable that she was either at school or had been left in the care of Miss Marriott, who was extremely fond of her. Polly's

whole being seems to have been concentrated on the necessity of secrecy, and for months the Edgar family heard nothing of her. They were a little surprised when, the following March, she failed to come to Richard's and Jenny's wedding, for she had made a point of being present at family celebrations, and had contributed with her comic, impassive humour to their intimate parties. But to the wedding of Richard and Jenny she did not come, and, moreover, sent no message. A week later, assisted by a midwife, she gave birth to Miss Marriott's first grandchild, Richard's son.

Miss Marriott had communicated with her at least once during her season at the Greenwich Theatre, for the purpose of asking her to join the company in a provincial tour starting in Huddersfield on the tenth of April, 1875, and this offer, with characteristic fortitude, Polly had accepted, though she must have known that the engagement could not be more than a fortnight after her confinement. As it happened, she was brought to bed only ten days before the opening date in Huddersfield, and before she had properly recovered from the birth was faced with the necessity of disposing of the child before she left London if she were to have any hope of keeping his existence a secret from Miss Marriott. In this the midwife proved helpful, for she promised to make discreet enquiries among respectable families of her acquaintance, with a view to finding a suitable foster-mother who would take the child to nurse for the small weekly payment which Polly could afford, and eventually recommended a decent and hard-working Billingsgate fish-porter's wife, whom she had attended in ten successive confinements.

Meanwhile Polly, as soon as she could manage to get up, which was within a week of the birth, did what she could to ensure the spiritual and material well-being of the unwanted baby. She carried him to a Catholic priest for baptism (she had herself been received into the Catholic Church at an early age)

and ingeniously concealed his identity by making a false entry in the parish register. She was not able to resist giving him the full name of his father, Richard Horatio Edgar, but she hid his true paternity under the surname of Wallace, writing "Walter Wallace, comedian" in that column of the register, which, if she had been completely truthful, would have linked her name and that of her illegitimate son with the bridegroom of Jenny Taylor.

No amount of research has yielded a clue to the mysterious "Walter Wallace, comedian" in the Greenwich Register, and it is more than probable that he never existed. None of the people still living who were associated with Miss Marriott's company, with the Greenwich Theatre or with Polly Richards, remembers such a person, and his name appears on none of the available contemporary playbills with those of Marie Richards, Miss Marriott, or any of the Edgar family. If he ever lived, he seems to have acted in an extraordinarily altruistic fashion in agreeing to give his name to a child that was not his, thereby incurring the full legal responsibility of paternity; but it is almost certain that he was no less ephemeral a figure then than now, and that in making this deceptive entry in the register Polly was giving the week-old Richard Horatio Edgar Wallace a convenient father who could never be traced, and who had his beginning and his end solely in her own imagination.

This done, she visited the four-roomed cottage in Norway Court to interview the fish-porter's wife, who, according to the midwife, was willing to undertake the job of foster-mother. She found her to be a respectable person in early middle age, who had already brought up ten children of her own, and was not in the least averse to undertaking an eleventh, since the last and youngest of her children was now six years old, and she missed, she said, having a baby about the place. The cottage, though overcrowded, was spotlessly clean, and Polly was received in a dark but proudly kept front parlour with plants in the window



Miss Marriott.



Josephine Richards: "Joey."

Richard
Horatio
Edgar.



Richard Horatio
Edgar in a
character part.

and a fringed cloth on the table. The sum of five shillings a week (a sufficient amount, considering Polly's meagre earnings) was agreed on as reasonable payment for the support and nourishment of the baby, and it was arranged that Millie Freeman, one of the fish-porter's children, should be sent round to Number 7, Ashburnham Grove the following morning to fetch him.

The next day, wrapped in a white shawl, Richard Horatio Edgar Wallace was carried carefully from Ashburnham Grove to the little courtyard behind Bridge Street and established in a basket cradle in the Freemans' kitchen. Polly packed her bags and left for Huddersfield.

Here, apparently without exciting much remark, she joined Miss Marriott and the newly married Jenny and Richard Edgar, and the following week the Huddersfield papers were able to report that "after a lengthy absence, we are again favoured by a short engagement of Miss Marriott, who during the week has appeared at the Theatre Royal in several legitimate pieces, including *Hamlet*, *The Lady of Lyons*, *The Stranger*, and *The School for Scandal*. She has been excellently supported by a company of which the Misses Grace Edgar, Jenny Taylor, Richards, Mrs. Lowe, Messrs. Vernon, Head, Edgar, Stephenson and Barrett are the principal members."

CHAPTER II

The Freemans

THE world which Polly Richards's baby first learned to observe was vastly different from the one into which he had been born. There were no spangles and glamour here, only hard work and poverty. The source of life was no longer the theatre, but Billingsgate Market. For Miss Marriott, nightly transfigured by doublet or toga, there was now only Mrs. Freeman, anxious and illiterate, with work-scoured hands and beaded Sunday mantle. No golden-haired Jenny Taylor, no Grace and Adeline Edgar exchanged confidences over his cradle as they twisted their curl-papers; instead there were the Freeman girls running home noisily from the board school round the corner and disappearing one by one into domestic service.

Yet, for all the drab monotony of its poverty, the world of Norway Court had its own richness. It was warm and coarse as new bread and swarming with life, drawing its sustenance from the river, its colour from the public-houses and the pavements. It was a world of narrow interests and inelegant speech, from which the unveiled realities of life and death, drunkenness and the police court, were never far distant: yet through it like a sweet core ran the warm blood-loyalty of the people who lived in it.

The pitfalls of poverty lay too near at hand in Norway Court not to be known and feared, and in self-defence the Freemans, like most of their kind, had walled themselves in as securely as they might behind a reassuring façade of respectability. Their parlour window was dignified with lace curtains and geraniums,

no matter what daily makeshifts were concealed in the kitchen. The parlour itself, dim unventilated shrine, kept by day as undisturbed as though nothing profaner than an occasional funeral party ever entered it, was secretly transformed at night, when the oil lamp was lit and the fringed curtains drawn, into a dormitory for the Freeman boys, sleeping on floor and sofa. An outsider might suppose that in a four-roomed cottage there might conceivably be some difficulty in finding sleeping room for a middle-aged man and his wife and their ten children, but he would never have been allowed a glimpse of their compromises and difficulties. Friends were gossiped with on the doorstep, not asked inside, and every morning, as soon as father and the elder boys had gone to the market, Mrs. Freeman removed the shake-downs with haste and decorum.

Both George Freeman and his wife had a deep love for children—a stroke of luck for Polly Richards's son, who had been little but a shame and an encumbrance to his own mother. On the first day, it is true, Mrs. Freeman had had misgivings, for young Harry Freeman on his way home from Billingsgate with a basket of fish had chosen this unlucky moment to be run over by a horse omnibus, and had been carried off to hospital with his ribs broken. Distracted with worry, for half a day she bitterly regretted her bargain, meeting her husband in the evening with the sorry announcement that somehow or other the new baby would have to be returned. But George Freeman, considering the child, was suddenly adamant. They had undertaken a trust, and they must abide by it. Moreover, he said, since neither Richard, Horatio nor Edgar were suitable or convenient names for a nine-days-old infant, the child should henceforth be considered as one of their own, and be displayed to the neighbours of Norway Court as Dick Freeman.

George Freeman was a man of some consequence to himself and to his family, and his decisions were accordingly respected.

With his short square beard, stern eye and uncommunicative manner he appeared to his children as an almost Jehovah-like figure of authority—an authority he was the better able to support from a pleasant consciousness of being worthy of it. In some ways, indeed, he was a remarkable man. Looked up to in Greenwich and Billingsgate as an upright citizen, a hard worker and the father of ten children, he took himself, his work and his citizenship seriously. He claimed with pride that his family could be traced directly back through City records for several centuries, and though this may have been an exaggeration he took considerable pains to preserve the civic dignity of the name of Freeman. Like his father before him he had long been a Freeman of the Haberdashers' Company, dining once a year in a frock-coat at the Haberdashers' Hall; and two years before Polly's baby was admitted to the household had followed his father in yet another respectable association in taking up, by patrimony, the Freedom of the City of London.

These distinctions, it is true, carried neither responsibility nor privilege, but they were precious to George Freeman and his family. They marked him as a respectable and worthy man, which he undoubtedly was, and provided improving topics of conversation in much the same way as distant connections with the aristocracy do in some middle-class families.

He had never learned to write, but he could read, and spent his evenings at the kitchen table studying the Bible. During these readings he was difficult to disturb, since even the largest print required concentration. Spectacles on nose, breathing deeply, following the words with a laborious forefinger, he would become oblivious of the swarming family around him, and was scarcely to be roused even by Mrs. Freeman's tearful announcements that one or other of their sons was in the usual trouble, and had sent an anxious message from the police station.

The Freeman boys, indeed, were a worry to their parents.



Mrs. Freeman.



George Freeman.

As soon as they were old enough to drink they drank, and as they were muscular young men and regarded the police in the light of natural enemies, they occasionally found themselves in Wandsworth Prison. These periodic disappearances, though they temporarily eased the Norway Court housing problem, were a source of tears and anguish to Mrs. Freeman. Chiefly she blamed Billingsgate for the wildness of their manners, but she also, for his tolerance in the matter, blamed her husband.

To tell the truth, the rowdy behaviour of his sons caused George Freeman less uneasiness than might have been expected. They got drunk from time to time, they fought a little, they knocked down a policeman or two, they were haled off to the police court and punished for it. That, in their father's eyes, was a fair enough sequence of events. He took no hand in the punishment the police were quite capable of administering, and he offered no sympathy. "Do him good," was all he ever said when Mrs. Freeman, twisting her apron, interrupted the Bible-reading with the news that Arthur had got five days this time, or Harry a fortnight. His detachment, indeed, may have had a little to do with his own conscience, for about twice a year he himself gave way to his only weakness and royally squandered his hard-earned savings on brandy.

The little drawer in the parlour chiffonier would then be furtively unlocked, the leather purse of sovereigns taken out, the big Bible put away, and George Freeman (who in his younger days had fought many a battle with his bare fists in drink, but now found his blood cooling) would sit like a rock in his favourite public-house, from which only the emptiness of the leather purse and the terrible agonies of remorse would finally dislodge him. During these breakings-out, as Dick with the other children early discovered, pennies and even shillings were to be had for the asking. Sovereigns that had taken months to scrape together would be tossed across the bar

as if they were ha'pence, and for days on end he would be magnificently drunk and incalculably generous.

After these orgies George Freeman's black remorse darkened the household. The Bible would be brought out to the table in wrathful silence, and none of the children would be reckless enough to disturb him. He would return to Billingsgate under the double scourge of biliousness and reproach, and for the next six months apply himself with Old Testament thoroughness to the sober duties of fish-porter, husband, and father.

In this mixed environment, straitened by poverty and hard work, enlivened by religion and drink, the baby known as Dick Freeman began to grow up and receive his first impressions of the world. He took his first unsteady steps on the floor of the Freeman kitchen, had his legs scrubbed and his nose wiped by Mrs. Freeman, Clara, Lisa, Millie and Mary Ann in turn, ran about and fell down and cut his knees in the courtyard, and little by little learned to reproduce the speech of the Norway Court children. This speech had nothing in common with Miss Marriott's beautiful enunciation, or the trained actor's accent of Richard or Polly. It was a harsh Cockney whine, plaintive and nasal. He picked it up with facility from the older children.

In their company, too, holding on to the skirts of the youngest Freemans, he began to share such interests as the place afforded. The Freemans' cottage was one of a row of four, facing squarely on to the courtyard where washing was hung out communally on Mondays and children screamed and played every day of the week. The amenities of the courtyard were shared by a considerable number of cottages and tenements, the chief of them being a rusty iron stop-cock in the middle. From this stop-cock flowed the court's only water supply, and in accordance with the frugal arrangements for public services in Victorian slum districts, was kept permanently locked by authority. The turning on of the tap in the early morning by a man with a key was an event of importance, and the inhabitants of Norway

Court attended with buckets. Monday, which was everyone's wash-day, produced a weekly crisis, for once the authority with the key was gone not a drop of water could be drawn until the following morning. The Freemans in particular, being a large family, found it difficult to assemble a sufficient number of pails, cans and basins to carry away the water for the day's washing, and as soon as he was old enough to carry a basin Dick waited his turn at the stop-cock with the others. When the waterman had gone, and the grown-ups had returned to their cottages with brimming buckets, the stop-cock belonged for the rest of the day to the children. They swung on it, climbed over it and played hop-scotch round it; it was a focal point in all their games and amusements. Another excitement, more thrilling because it happened so rarely, was the occasional digging out of the Norway Court middens. On these occasions Mrs. Freeman closed her windows and stayed indoors, but to the courtyard children the performance was enthralling. Carts came through the narrow passage leading to Bridge Street, back alleys were invaded with barrow and shovel, and the yard was noisy with the trampling of men and horses.

At the end of two years, when Dick Freeman was old enough to run about and begin to enjoy these excitements with the other children, Polly Richards came back to Norway Court to see him. In those two years Polly had stoutened a little and grown perceptibly older, and in her maroon-coloured bonnet and mantle had already something of the look of a middle-aged woman. Clara, who had left her latest situation on the strength of betrothal to a milkman, was at home at the time, and received Mrs. Richards with her mother in the little parlour.

At this second visit Polly was depressed and diffident, for things had not been going well with her, and the twenty-four pounds which had already passed in five-shilling instalments from her pocket to Mrs. Freeman's had been increasingly difficult to scrape together. She had, in fact,

come to break it to the Freemans that she could scrape no longer, and had accordingly made arrangements to have the two-year-old Richard Horatio Edgar "taken in somewhere."

Where that somewhere was, Mrs. Richards did not say or Mrs. Freeman enquire, for in Norway Court it was well understood that to have a child "taken in" meant sending it to a charitable institution. Such a step, now that the child was no longer an infant and so likely to prove increasingly expensive, would have solved Polly's problem easily enough, and she may have supposed him more likely to take kindly to orphanage life than Joey had been before him; but to Mrs. Freeman the suggestion was unthinkable. She had what poor Polly had not —a conception of such institutions as poverty's final nightmare and degradation, and she flatly refused to have anything to do with it. Besides, as she pointed out, Dick was already a member of the Freeman family. To send him to a home would be as impossible as to part with one of her own children. She did not like to think, she informed Polly tartly, what Mr. Freeman would have to say when he heard of it. Had he not refused to let her return the baby when he had been with them less than a day? If Mrs. Richards wanted the baby adopted, then she, Mrs. Freeman, would adopt him. They would be proud, she said, to call the child their own. Clara, who from the first had made herself Dick's champion, vigorously nodded agreement.

It must have been easy for Polly, harassed and doubtful, to see in the Freemans' cottage a more human and kindly home for her son than any institution was likely to provide. It was not, perhaps, the environment she would have chosen, but what had she to offer that was so much better? The little parlour, the lace curtains, the geraniums on the sill may have reassured her no less than the obvious eagerness of Mrs. Freeman and Clara. At length, after some hesitation, she agreed to the arrangement, stipulating only that she should be allowed to see the child

whenever she was able, and was shown out of Number 4, Norway Court with polite disapproval.

The Freemans, with little or no understanding of Polly's life and its difficulties, undoubtedly thought it a shocking thing that any woman should be so readily persuaded to be parted from her child. They discussed it incessantly, with more feeling than discretion, and Mrs. Freeman and Clara set about mothering Dick with more than customary fervour, in a genuine attempt to compensate for her unnaturalness. It is not surprising that as he grew older, and in spite of the occasional visits of a stout lady in bonnet and mantle who gave him sixpences and gallery tickets, he nursed the conviction that she had done him an irreparable injury, and that Mrs. Freeman was the only person in the world deserving the title of Mother.

One is tempted to wonder how he might have grown up if he had been allowed to share the precarious theatrical life of Polly Richards, for he might have found much in her chequered and haphazard existence to satisfy the imaginative longings of his boyhood. But the theatre remained for many years nothing more than an enchanting place for which he hungered without precisely knowing why, and enjoyed (when he was old enough to earn, beg or even steal sixpence for a seat on the wooden benches of the Elephant or Surrey) with unaccountable passion. Polly herself, with her love of anecdote and quiet humour, might well have found response in the sharp-witted boy who already, in a variety of ways, had begun to resemble her; but by her own act she had changed the image of herself in his imagination into something treacherous, leaving Mrs. Freeman and Clara to be the first in the lifelong succession of women who emotionally influenced him.

He was an affectionate, impudent and engaging child, and found in Clara, though there were eighteen years between them, an unfailing champion and confederate. It was she who, when the time came, led him by the hand to the door of St. Peter's

Infant School in Thames Street; who, whenever she was at home, stood between him and punishment, and hid the lurid covers of his penny shockers from the eyes of her parents. It was Clara, on a later and terrifying occasion, who protected him from the ugly threat of the police court and reform school, defying parents and husband with a vigour astonishing in so gentle a person. For this passionate and protective loyalty she was rewarded, in spite of the difference in their ages, by his confidence, and a share in the gallery tickets that occasionally came his way from Polly Richards.

Clara made herself, perhaps, so generous a champion of Dick's childhood because she had had so little youth herself, and saw in the adopted boy possibilities of a richer and more promising life than she would ever know. Like her sisters she had been sent at the age of twelve into domestic service, and her girlhood had been a long monotony of domestic drudgery. She was fond of telling Dick how, when she had been packed off to her first situation, she had taken her ninepenny doll along with her, hidden at the bottom of her trunk among the aprons. For this piece of childishness she had received a whipping and much sarcasm from her grandfather, who held that since she was mature enough to earn her own living she should have yielded up her doll to the younger children. But Clara, with characteristic obstinacy, had not been persuaded, and as she was soon out of reach, "living in" in Deptford and economically independent on a weekly wage of two shillings, there was nothing to be done about it. Clara had kept the doll for her own comfort and as a symbol of independence in her new life, so unchildishly made up of carrying coals and blacking grates, cleaning brasses and washing up, and endlessly scrubbing other people's stairs and sculleries.

From time to time she would be out of a situation and come home, and it was in these intervals that she and Dick developed their intimacy. They explored the grassy uplands of Greenwich

Park and went for walks together along the narrow footpath railed in between Greenwich Hospital and the river. When Dick fell down and cut his knees on the courtyard cobbles it was to Clara, if she were there, that he ran for comfort. And when the Greenwich children, with the sharp-nosed malice of their kind, got wind of his history and shouted "Barstid!" after him all the way from the school gates to Norway Street, it was Clara who rushed out and boxed their ears, assuring the weeping child with more fervour than truth that he was a Freeman indeed, that she was his sister, and the mother and father he knew his real parents.

As the boy grew older the world of Norway Court became small and childish, and he began to look further afield for his adventures. Billingsgate Market, wet, noisy and smelly in the dark hours of the morning, was a new and exciting place to which on occasion "Father" could be persuaded to take him. It was part of George Freeman's job to drive his employer, a fish-broker, from his home in Greenwich to Billingsgate every morning, and from time to time Dick, muffled to the eyes, was allowed to sit on the box of the cab beside him. Every morning, winter and summer, George Freeman harnessed the horse and started the wheels over the Greenwich cobbles at three o'clock, arriving in the market about a quarter to four, when Dick would be turned loose to watch the unloading of the fish at the slippery quay, and marvel at the dexterity of the porters (Mr. Freeman among them) who clattered over the wet pavements in their heavy boots, balancing dripping boxes on the crowns of their leather hats.

Many years later, when in middle age he set himself to write what he remembered of his boyhood, the Billingsgate porters and the eating-house where George Freeman had regaled him with bread and coffee stood out with drypoint clearness in his memory.

"Down Love Lane, off Eastcheap, was a dimly-lit coffee-

shop, redolent of fish. Here a man, and even a boy, could feast royally for threepence—wonderful coffee in thick cone-shaped mugs, and new bread and country butter. How often, wedged between the white-smocked porters, have I sat, my jaws working, my ears cocked for that flow of language which is Billingsgate's pride. And I heard nothing, for I was a child, and your labouring man is a gentleman."

One of the Grimsby trawlers sending its cargo of fish to the Billingsgate wharves was later to play its part in a bold and none too reputable adventure of his adolescence, but for the time being he was content merely to watch the boats come and go from the wet quayside, driving sedately home on the guv'nor's cab when the day's work was done.

About the time that Dick emerged (with no particular distinction) from the infant classes at St. Peter's School in Thames Street, the Freemans moved from Norway Court to Camberwell. The family had diminished considerably by this time, Clara being settled with her milkman in Deptford, another sister married to a flower-seller, and at least one of the boys absorbed into the army. The chief differences occasioned by the move, so far as Dick was concerned, were that he found himself one of the noisy conglomeration of children at the big Board School in Reddin's Road, and Mr. Freeman's breakings out (followed by increasingly pious periods of remorse) no longer took place in the Rose and Crown or the Beehive, but in the worldlier atmosphere of the Old Kent Road.

Reddin's Road School, at which the boy eventually finished his education at the age of twelve, was a gaunt and forbidding place, noisy, dirty and bare, and he learned little or nothing there that interested him. "A big yellow barracks of a place, built (or rumour lied) on an old rubbish pit into which the building was gradually sinking. We used to put chalk marks on the wall near the ground to check the subsidence. And every morning when I turned the corner . . . and saw the Board

School still standing where it did, I was filled with a helpless sense of disappointment." Sitting day after day on the hard benches in a class of fifty he assimilated as much knowledge as was normally drummed into the heads of children who were not expected, when they left school at the age of ten or twelve, to become anything more spectacular than errand boys. Elementary arithmetic, a few unrelated facts of history, an inaccurate conception of the geography of the British Isles, were unwillingly absorbed in the course of years from the daily monotony.

School was a burden, a disagreeable necessity from which one escaped with relief as soon as one was old enough. The Freemans were sufficiently ambitious for Dick's education to insist on his remaining at school until he was twelve, instead of going out to work at ten as the others had done, and the extra two years were passed in a fever of impatience. It says much for the disinterestedness of his foster-parents that his education was pursued (though reluctantly on his part) for so long, for in a family like the Freemans' even the wages of an errand boy were of importance. "To the average poor father and mother," he afterwards wrote, "school is a place which occupies a boy's time that otherwise would be spent in making himself a nuisance at home. When he gets a little older, school becomes an interference with the liberty of the subject; the boy is being detained when he ought to be earning his living."

Out of school, however, he was allowed to be useful, and, since Mrs. Freeman was too busy to do her own marketing, learned in the course of his daily errands every alley and back street in Blackheath, Deptford and Peckham. "Up before breakfast, and with a mat bag ranging the Old Kent Road for the day's provisions. . . . A pound of sixpenny 'pieces' from Mills the butcher, two penn'orth of potatoes from the greengrocer's, a parsnip and a penn'orth of carrots—I came to have a violent antipathy to Irish stew. . . . I was something of a

connoisseur in pieces; could tell at a glance the tainted 'end,' guessed unerringly the depth of fat in a scraggy nob of mutton. One could buy fourpenny pieces, but only the very poor touched these. They were almost low, and one lost caste if detected buying them."

It was about this time that Dick was initiated into the interesting local world of petty crime. He joined, as a sort of junior hanger-on, a gang of boys whose favourite exploit (a singularly pointless one) was stealing type from a type-founder's. What they did with the booty is difficult to imagine; their activities seem to have been a curious example of the pursuit of art for art's sake. "I never took part in the raids carried out under the direction of a desperado very little older than myself, but I received a little of the loot and regretted that it was not more useful." In later life these unprofitable escapades inspired a series of more hair-raising stories with which, with fine imaginative disregard for truth, he was fond of improving the anecdotes of his boyhood; of how, being small and light, he had been handed at night through the fanlights of shop doors by older confederates engaged in more serious depredations, and shared in criminal exploits more picturesque, at the distance of forty years, than probable. Even as a boy he had inherited something of Polly's talent for telling, with extreme seriousness, stories of personal adventure which his audience enjoyed without altogether believing, and as he grew older the dramatic touch in personal reminiscence tended to be stronger. He did not need to draw entirely on his imagination, however, for childish experience of petty crime. "About now I met a man who asked me to buy him cigarettes—a penn'orth at a time. He gave me nice new florins and I brought him back the change. After I had changed five, I took the sixth to the nearest policeman and said:

" 'If you please, sir, is this money snide?'

"He broke it with his finger and thumb and said that it was

snide. So my employer was pinched, and the magistrate said I was a smart little boy. I kept the *News of the World* cutting for a long time—it was the first time my name ever appeared in print."

By the time he was eleven years old the theatre had become an obsession, and since the sixpences to be extracted from George Freeman during his breakings out were few and far between, Dick began to feel the need of a personal income. "On less than sixpence the evening was a failure. The gallery cost fourpence at the Surrey (as against threepence at the Elephant); an extra penny was required for a bottle of ginger-beer and a penny for the tram ride home." Gallery tickets still occasionally came his way from Polly Richards, and on these red-letter days he and Clara went to the theatre together, Clara as breathless as the boy, and pointing out the stout little small-part actress with mingled reverence and disapproval. Once, too, he acquired an unexpected sixpence from his half-sister Joey, now an impressive young lady of sixteen or so whom Mrs. Richards, on one of her rare visits, had taken him to see in the grown-up grandeur of her last year at school. But such windfalls were infrequent and the theatre a constant craving. He began to fret more impatiently than ever against the nuisance of school, and to consider ways and means of earning a living.

The theatre was in his blood, and it is difficult to suppose that even without encouragement he could ever have been indifferent to it; his two generations of theatrical forbears were too close for that. But he had also by this time struck up a friendship which led him indirectly into nearer and more exciting contact with the stage, and by giving him glimpses of the mysterious professional life behind the scenes fed and increased his passionate hunger for it.

Near the Glengall Arms, where George Freeman was now in the habit of drinking his brandy, was a small tea-and-coffee shop run by an energetic, attractive and intelligent young

woman called Mrs. Anstee. Here Dick began to spend occasional pennies on cups of strong tea and the jam puffs for which Mrs. Anstee was locally famous, and to discuss in the little parlour behind the shop whatever happened to be uppermost in his fancy. He had recently at Sunday school discovered the pleasures of fiction, and it was exciting to talk over the finer points of *Christy's Old Organ* or *The Wide, Wide World* with someone who took as lively an interest as Mrs. Anstee. When business was slack they read aloud to one another from penny dreadfuls, newspapers, and second-hand books which Dick picked up here and there for a penny or ha'penny, and when a new Free Library opened in the Old Kent Road it was to Mrs. Anstee rather than to the Freemans that he carried the dog-eared volumes selected at random from the library catalogue.

In a different sphere, Mrs. Anstee might well have cut a prepossessing figure; alert, lively, sympathetic, with a quick intelligence which responded delightedly to the boy's vague groping after some kind of mental satisfaction, she was the best and most stimulating companion possible for a child aching for something to try his wits upon, and with no one, beside herself, to encourage his eccentric appetite for reading. Behind the counter of her shop, in the clatter of coffee-cups and the steam of tea-urns, they struck up a lasting and affectionate friendship.

The congenial company of Mrs. Anstee, however, was not the only thing that made the shop attractive, for her husband, a part-time scene-shifter at the Gaiety, possessed the supreme charm of being professionally connected with the theatre. Whenever he could be persuaded to take Dick with him the boy was smuggled into the theatre under the pretence of doing odd jobs and running errands, and saw many of the Gaiety productions of the 'eighties from giddy and unlawful positions in the flies, or mutely crouched behind a piece of scenery.

Occasionally, too, Mr. Anstee would "get paper," and bring a couple of gallery tickets home to his wife. Then Dick and Mrs. Anstee would sit craning forward, elbows on knees, from the high back benches, drinking in the splendours of musical comedy and admiring the dazzling changes of scene which only the deftness of Mr. Anstee and his confederates made possible.

These rich experiences only increased Dick's craving, and since he needed money to gratify it, made him more than ever impatient with Reddin's Road. Unknown to Mrs. Freeman, whose respectability would have been shocked by such a proceeding, he began "hopping the wag" in the afternoons to sell newspapers. Employed on the sale-or-return system, he was entrusted with a bundle of *Echoes* and a pitch outside Cook's travel agency at Ludgate Circus, and here, less than a dozen yards from the wall which now carries a bronze plaque to his memory, he was able by much hoarse shouting and flourishing of newspapers to earn a wage varying between two and three shillings a week.

These profits he spent on toffee, ginger-beer and the theatre, concealing as well as he might both his source of revenue and absences from school, but this happy state of affairs could not last for ever. His late homecomings, dodging in quickly to avoid the heavy hand of Mrs. Freeman after the last tram had brought him back from the Surrey or Elephant, aroused suspicion, and his school friends were only too shrill in explaining his guilty absences. Mrs. Freeman was grieved. Only "raggity" boys sold newspapers in the streets, and besides, Dick was throwing away his education. He was returned, chastened and resentful, to afternoon school, and his income once more reduced to the few pence he was able to earn legitimately, after school hours, by running errands.

The time when he might really call himself a wage-earner was nevertheless drawing near, and the kindly Freemans, hoping to make the break between school and work as pleasant as

possible, determined to give him what neither they nor their children had ever enjoyed—a holiday.

Mr. Frisby, a nephew of George Freeman's, who had been a stopper-grinder in a London bottle factory and had since retired and set himself up genteelly as a confectioner in Yorkshire, had come south some time before to chaperone his daughter Lizzie to a Crystal Palace choir festival, and in the course of the visit had paid his respects to the Freemans.

Lizzie Frisby and her father had been grandly entertained to the first lobster of the season and had afterwards been taken for a walk in Greenwich Park. It was Mr. Frisby's first sight of the boy whom his Uncle George had adopted, and in spite of the fact that Dick behaved rather badly during the walk and had to be spoken to sharply for cheeking Mr. Freeman, he took so strong a fancy to him that he suggested that before Dick was put out to work he should come and spend a holiday in Dewsbury. Accordingly, when he had been released from the boys' entrance at Reddin's Road for the last time, Mrs. Freeman packed a small hamper of clothes, dressed him in his best suit with a label bearing his name and address attached to the top button, and sent him by train (in charge of the guard) to Wakefield.

Until this time Dick's experience of the world outside his own Cockney orbit had been confined to Sunday-school excursions to Richmond Park, Epping and Chislehurst; the long, slow journey to Wakefield was an adventure. He was claimed at the station by the Frisbys and driven to Dewsbury, where he spent an enchanted three weeks in the confectioner's shop, playing with the seven Frisby girls and enjoying the most unheard-of treats, such as being taken down a coal-mine by a neighbour. The Frisbys themselves, homely and jolly and noisy, petted and fussed over him, laughing at his pert answers and showing him off to their friends as a sharp one, a caution. It was to be thirteen years before he saw them again, and then as a young

man in love and enjoying his first taste of celebrity, graciously pleased to tell a reporter from the local paper how he had gone down Combs Pit as a boy, before the explosion; but on this first holiday he was absorbed happily into Mr. Frisby's houseful of children, and thought Dewsbury, for all its black pit-heads and factory chimneys, infinitely more desirable than London.

It was a last brief period of freedom. He was now twelve years old, which was high time to begin earning the wages of a "smart lad," and before the three weeks were up Mr. Freeman had found him an opening in a Newington Causeway printing firm at five shillings a week. Dick was once more scrubbed, dressed and labelled, wept over a little by the Frisby girls, and sent importantly back to London to earn his living.

CHAPTER III

Dick Goes To Work

WORKING for the printer in Newington Causeway turned out to be less congenial than Dick had hoped, for the firm printed nothing more literary than paper bags. For his five shillings a week he stood for eight and a half hours a day before a lithographic machine and took off brown paper bags as they came from the press, moist with the newly printed names and addresses of grocers and bakers. Sometimes, in special orders for confectioners, the bags were white with gold lettering, and he walked home to Camberwell with a muddy film of gold dust over his boots. He wore a printer's apron of heavy felt and his hands and face became grimed with printer's ink. It was exhausting, tedious labour, and he soon found that he had no particular love for it. Work, which he had looked forward to as a means to theatre tickets and independence, was proving almost as great a waste of time as school, and almost as unremunerative as running errands. Often, indeed, he had no more than two shillings to show at the end of the week, the rest having gone in tram fares, toffee, and a blood-sucking system of usury practised in the firm, by which fourpence could be borrowed from most of the employees on any day of the week, on the understanding that one returned them sixpence on Saturday. A fifty-per-cent-a-week interest might have deterred the prudent, but on lean days it was a sure way of raising money, and Dick, in common with the other boys, lost a good proportion of his wages by it.

His first week's wages, too, had been held as a deposit by his employers, to insure them, apparently, against the danger of his

leaving without notice. He had been required to put his name to a paper agreeing to this, and had taken a certain pleasure in copying the unfamiliar "Richard Horatio Edgar Wallace" from the birth certificate which the firm had also considered it essential to examine before giving him his five-shilling appointment. To his bitter dismay, after he had failed to turn up one day owing to the superior attractions of a private engagement, he was shown the door, and curtly told that the five shillings deposit was forfeit. Annoyed by the loss of his money, and afraid, perhaps, to go home with empty pockets, he took his trouble to the nearest policeman, and on the advice of this legal authority went in twelve-year-old dignity to the police court and took out a summons.

It was his first sight of the police court with which the Freeman boys had for years been all too familiar. He waited his turn in the corridor among the assault and affiliation cases, told his story to the magistrate over the edge of the witness-box, and won his case against his first employers.

This was the beginning of a long succession of jobs as a printer's boy. None of them lasted for more than a few months, and some he left, to oblige himself or his employers, after a week or a fortnight. Everything seemed to conspire against steady employment. In one firm there would be a strike, and Dick, uncomprehending but amiable, would down tools with the rest; in another there would be a slack season and laying off of hands; in another a cheeky answer would make an enemy of the foreman. In and out of a job, but never idle for more than a few days at a time, he drifted about the City and South London, usually at the end of the week handing over a few shillings to Mrs. Freeman. He was doing no better and no worse than other boys of his age, who, turned out year after year by the Board Schools with no resources and precious few qualifications, considered themselves lucky to be able to pick up a living by casual labour.

Between jobs and out of working hours life followed a more congenial pattern. He haunted the Free Library and Mrs. Anstee's shop, visited Clara (now Mrs. Harry Hanford) in her dairy on Tanner's Hill, explored the south side of the river from Greenwich to Rotherhithe, and sometimes crossed on the ferry to the Isle of Dogs to hang round the docks and lose himself in Limehouse and Shadwell. Also he made friends. Chief of these was another printer's boy, one Willie Ramsey, who drew him into the social life of the Christ Church Bermondsey Temperance Society and went for long confidential walks with him twice a week. There was in those days an almost complete lack of cheap entertainment, and boys who nowadays would spend their evenings in cinemas, dance halls and social clubs had no choice then between the temperance societies and the streets. Dick and his friend Ramsey availed themselves of both, and were probably none the worse for having to rely on their own resources for entertainment. The temperance society saw them regularly every Thursday evening, and as members of its cricket and football clubs they spent their Saturday afternoons playing on Peckham Rye. The society was not, however, merely a social matter to them, for as they grew into their teens they both earnestly supported the temperance movement.

Temperance was a burning question in the 'nineties, sustained by much organised propaganda. The Demon Rum was the one devil that religious and social bodies were never tired of trying to cast out from the working-class, and indeed there was some reason for their efforts. The gin palaces turned out their quota of fighting drunks on the streets every night, and crowded perambulators cluttered the pavements and doors of public bars until after midnight. Dick himself in his younger days had spent hours, miserable and peevish, standing outside the swing doors of saloons, waiting for "Father" to reappear and be steered home, and his ears were filled with the moan of Mrs. Freeman. Harry Hanford, Clara's milkman husband, alternated blithely

between crusading teetotalism and passionate bouts of drink, and "old Campbell," the umbrella-maker across the road, could always be relied on to entertain the boy with hair-raising stories of eternal fires awaiting the drunkard. Under pressure of homely preaching, illustrated by familiar bad examples, Dick and his friend Ramsey became earnest disciples of the temperance movement, and at the age of fifteen signed the pledge with enthusiasm.

The temperance society had, besides, its lighter side, and the two boys were often seen in well-buttoned suits and clean collars at the subscription dances (colloquially known as "tuppenny 'ops") organised in the winter. Occasionally there were debates and political meetings as well, and these, they found, were even more to their taste. Their political conscience was sufficiently awakened by these gatherings to make them enjoy canvassing for the Rotherhithe Liberal and Radical Association, in support of which their duties at a shilling a night included the breaking up of local Conservative meetings.

Another source of interest and amusement was the St. John Ambulance Brigade, with which they spent one evening a week learning to roll bandages and set splints. It was good enough fun at the time, and something to do, but for Dick at least this amateur training was to prove important. Several years later, bored with the heavy routine of army life, he was to remember his own deftness with splints and bandages and the flattering approval of the St. John Ambulance instructor, and apply for a transfer that permanently affected his life.

But of all the activities which Dick and Ramsey shared, their evening explorations were the pleasantest. Blackheath was their favourite hunting ground, for here, on foggy nights, with the gas-lit street lamps no more than a distant glimmer, it was possible to imagine oneself hopelessly and permanently lost, and to wander hallooing in the dark in a state of thrilling terror. The Kidbrooke murder added just that touch of real horror

which the place lacked: while the hue and cry was on they went up on the Heath after dark nearly every night, pretending to discover clues and hunt for the murderer, and taking care to keep prudently close to each other until it was time to go home to the Freemans' kitchen and the solid comforts of strong tea and a bloater.

The Kidbrooke murder was a much discussed crime, appallingly gruesome and thrillingly close at hand, but when real crime was not to be had they invented it. In a narrow alley between Shad Thames and Bermondsey Wall they found a dark, dilapidated and decaying house that had seen better days and now stared on the street with blank upper windows and broken panes, dirty pieces of board being nailed across the lower windows instead of shutters. This empty house, the boys decided, was the lair of certain desperate underworld characters, principally coiners, and it was a favourite game to lurk round its forbidding doorways after dark, peering between the boards for the chink of candle-light that meant the gang was at work, and shivering with a half-belief in their own imaginings. The Prospect of Whitby, too, on the other side of the river, was so perfect a haunt for cut-throats and smugglers that a pleasant shiver could be induced by merely sitting on the stone stairs beneath it, listening to the growl of voices from the bar and watching the dark river for a boat to come nosing its way silently between the anchored barges. If, however, no such thing happened, and no one more nearly related to blood and thunder than a dock labourer or a pier-master pushed cheerfully through the swing doors and made off down the darkness of Wapping Wall, the boys would concoct blood-curdling stories between them, and tramp home across London Bridge as satisfied as though they had encountered Jack the Ripper.

Their favourite walk was along the south bank of the Pool, between the wharves and warehouses of Rotherhithe Street, past Cherry Garden Pier and along Bermondsey Wall to Shad

Thames. It was not the shipping that interested them, though the Pool was often crowded with foreign boats and there was still a fair amount of sail to be seen; the wharves and warehouses, the alleys and dark passages and derelict houses, the muddy shingle and wet river stairs were what attracted them. They were not bred to the sea, but to the streets, and ran in and out along the waterfront like eager young rats, nosing about to see what they could discover.

Excitement was what they were after, and sometimes they found it, as on the red-letter day at Creek Bridge, Deptford, when they helped to pull an old woman out of the water, and were afterwards a little abashed to find that she had wanted to die there. There was a more ribald evening, too, when an old man and woman had started to fight drunkenly with their fists outside a public-house, and the woman had started to run away and had fallen over the edge of Cherry Garden Pier into the river. Some of these things Dick wrote down in a penny exercise book he was in the habit of carrying, and told Ramsey portentously: "If ever I get a chance, I'm going to publish this." It was fine to imagine, however wildly, that one might one day publish one's made-up stories instead of merely inventing them, and see one's smugglers' and coiners' dens immortalised between paper covers in the stationers' shops, like the shockers in the twopenny Aldine Library.

For the rest, they remained very consciously respectable, scorning the female sex and insisting on collars and ties when the rest of their friends were content with dingy mufflers. Ramsey, who has spent the rest of his working life in the printing trade which Dick soon abandoned, remembers that they were inclined to be "a little bit posh," and took a satisfied interest in their own appearance. They were proud of their temperance associations, and made a serious pact never to use bad language. They resisted the Demon Rum with a firmness that delighted Mrs. Freeman, and prudently invested the

shillings that might have been squandered on drink in weekly instalments on a pair of brand-new bicycles.

While Ramsey stayed on doggedly in the printing trade, Dick wandered erratically from one job to another. For a time he earned four-and-six a week as a reader's boy in the firm of Waterlow, Sons and Layton in Farringdon Street, gabbling through written copy while the reader checked the proofs; for another firm he carried heavy parcels of newly printed railway time-tables from the printer's to the railway offices, and found the job profitless and boring. Between jobs he filled in time as an errand boy at one-and-ninepence a week, using his new bicycle, and picked up temporary work here and there in South London and the City. Newspaper-selling, this time of a more respectable and established sort, employed him for a few months; wearing a peaked cap emblazoned with the name of W. H. Smith he cried his papers up and down the high windy platform of St. Paul's Station, suspended as giddily as a bridge over the river. It is a cold place, exposed to every bitter wind that sweeps off the Thames, and gulls cry mournfully over the platforms and sit on the railings. Dick was thin, and felt the cold go through him. As soon as he could he exchanged St. Paul's for the comfort of indoor work in a cheap boot and shoe shop in Peckham.

But the shoe shop was as tedious as anything else, and Dick suffered from vague dissatisfaction and depression. It was all very well to wear a white apron and earn an extra shilling by overtime on Saturday nights, but it was impossible to convince oneself that there was much future in it. However long one stayed, there would never be anything more interesting to do than chalking the price on the soles of ladies' slippers, and hooking down dangling bunches of boots from the front of the shop. Besides, the pay was poor. In a fretful spirit he gave in his notice and found a job in a Camberwell rubber factory.

Here for a while things seemed a little better, and he settled

down to the making of mackintosh cloth. When the hours were too long or the work too tedious he leaned over the vat where rubber was dissolved in naphtha and inhaled the fumes—a cheap and easy method of intoxication which the other boys taught him. But even this, since it made him very sick, had to be abandoned. He comforted himself by making up rude couplets about the factory foremen, and was surprised when this talent failed to endear him to his superiors.

To Clara in Deptford, or to Liza when he helped her wire the roses which her husband sold, he confided his restlessness and discontent, but they could give him no better advice than to try and be "steady." In their view he was doing as well as could be expected and had no cause to grumble, but Dick, helping to tie the tight bunches of moss-roses on Friday nights, or varnishing ivy berries with sugar and water for the winter market, grumbled incessantly. He had a feeling, which speedily became conviction, that unless he made some violent change he would drift drably and uneventfully on like the rest of the Freemans. This, since he believed himself capable of something better (he had no idea what), he had no intention of doing. He began to lie in wait for an opportunity.

The opportunity presented itself in the shape of a seaman with whom Dick shared a penn'orth of toffee in the Surrey gallery. According to this friendly young man the best way to make a fresh start in life was to run away to sea, and he offered to help Dick get a job in a Grimsby trawler. This daring suggestion fired the boy's imagination, for what could be less like a Camberwell rubber factory than a life of seafaring adventure? He made up his mind instantly, and arranged to meet his new friend on the morning of the day when he was due to return to Grimsby, bringing with him the signed permission of his parent or guardian, which, since he was only fifteen, would be necessary when he came to sign his papers.

At home he said nothing for a day or two, having sufficient

prudence to realise that Mrs. Freeman would be certain to disapprove of so reckless a venture, and that Mr. Freeman might even refuse his permission. Avoiding all argument, he spent the intervening days going as usual to the rubber factory and in practising Mr. Freeman's signature; this was easy enough, for, being the only thing he had ever learned to write, George Freeman's signature was candid and uncomplicated. To Mrs. Freeman, the night before he left, he mentioned casually that he had got a job out of London, and since Dick's new jobs in the last three years had been as thick as blackberries, and since "out of London" might well have been supposed to mean the other side of Blackheath, he escaped questioning. He met his seaman by appointment and went to Grimsby.

Through the good offices of his new friend he was signed on for a year as ship's cook and captain's boy (Heaven knows what qualifications he represented himself as having) in one of the trawlers of the Hewett Fishing Company, and as soon as the boat was a mile out of Grimsby began to learn certain disagreeable facts about the sea. It was December, 1890, and bitter weather. The trawler pitched and rolled and stank of fish, and Dick, wrestling with cocoa and mutton stew in the cramped galley, made the surprising discovery that he was not a sailor. He was, in fact, deathly sick, and as the days went by his misery did not diminish. Throughout the whole of December and January the trawler was buffeted by gales up and down the North Sea, and the fish that were caught froze on the deck before they could be shovelled. The yards froze as stiff as iron, and the sleeping quarters of the crew were little warmer. With chattering teeth and cracked knuckles Dick crouched over his galley stove and in the intervals of sea-sickness tried to conceal his deficiencies as a cook. In vain; his only experience of cooking had been watching Mrs. Freeman at her kitchen range, and the puddings and soups demanded by the hungry crew were hopelessly beyond him. When some greasy swill or soggy



On the milk round with Harry Hanford.



Edie Cockle.



Jenny Taylor.



Harry Hanford

suet mess had been sent to the cabin his ears tingled from the heavy hands of the captain or mate, and with the crew, though they showed him the rudiments of deep-sea cooking, he fared little better. He had outraged their superstitions by bringing a paper of pins on board, and this bad impression was not easy to dissipate. His efforts to ingratiate himself with boiled puddings proved a disheartening failure. And through all this misery his sea-sickness was unceasing.

On the seventh of February the trawler put into Grimsby, and Dick suddenly decided to run away. It was impossible to endure both the hardship and the sickness for another ten months, and he thought of home with insupportable longing. He went ashore with the others, and making an excuse to break away, started to walk to London.

He had no clothes but what he stood up in and no money beyond a shilling which he had stolen from the captain. How far it was to London he did not know, nor how long it might take him to get there. His heavy sea-boots were a size too big, and rubbed his heels. He began to realise that the journey would be a slow one.

Wherever he could get a day's work he stayed, and earned a shilling. Where there was no work to be had he stole from bakers' vans, and ate the loaves in the barns and outhouses where he slept. He tasted nothing but bread and water in the three weeks that it took him to walk home.

The uncomfortable sea-boots lasted him as far as St. Albans, and here he had the good luck to be able to steal a pair of shoes; they had been newly cleaned in the scullery of a big house and put out on the window-sill. Wearing these, he presented himself, hungry and ragged, at Mrs. Freeman's back door. It was the first she had heard of his sea-going, and thankful as she was to have him safely back, she listened to his tale of desertion with frank horror. For desertion, she knew, there were terrible penalties, even prison; the shadow of Wandsworth

Jail rose up and frightened her. She warned him to say nothing of his adventures to the others, and had a whispered consultation with Mr. Freeman when he came home from the market.

The result of this conference was that Clara was fetched over from Deptford, and her advice asked. What could they do that would encourage Dick to be "steady"? He had already run through more jobs than one could count, he had run away to sea, and had put the finishing touch to his unsteadiness by deserting ship. What was to be done? Would Clara's husband consider taking him on? Wouldn't it be a respectable and steadying thing if he went into milk?

Clara, defensive as always where Dick was concerned, welcomed the suggestion with enthusiasm. He should live with her at 67 Tanner's Hill and be initiated into the milk round by Mr. Hanford. Nothing could be better. He should have half a crown a week and his keep, and she would be able to keep an eye on him.

A few days later, with his clothes in a corded box, Dick went to the Beresford Dairy on Tanner's Hill and embarked on his new career as a milk roundsman.

CHAPTER IV

The Milk Round and First Love

CLARA FREEMAN had met her future husband when she was working as a general servant in Camden Road, and had been so much fascinated by the blandishments of the handsome milkman who set down the cans on the area steps each morning that she had been scolded by her employer for wasting time, and had had the mortification of seeing his custom transferred to another dairy. She took her revenge by accepting the milkman's suit and giving notice.

Harry Hanford had a dashing, sensual sort of charm, and it was to his personality rather than to hard work that he owed the success of his dairy. Sturdy and good-looking, with a soft moustache and fair hair neatly brushed and parted, he had long ago discovered that back-door gallantry was the secret of a profitable milk round, and never scrupled to pay a few well-chosen compliments in the interests of business. He had been in some little trouble over embezzlement before Clara met him, but by this time was respectably established in his own business, with past indiscretions comfortably forgotten. He had never, it is true, succeeded in supporting a milk round for very long in the same place, for whereas his charm of manner rapidly built up a connection, his fondness for drink as readily undid it. This was curious, for he was a great temperance man, a prominent member of various teetotal societies and a popular and eloquent speaker at street-corner meetings. His temperance activities may, indeed, have been a proof of how deeply he understood and feared his own weakness, for they were undoubtedly sincere while they lasted; during his spells

of being "on the dry" he was a fanatical abstainer. Unfortunately these periods alternated with equally drastic spells of being "on the booze," when his customers could go without their morning milk for ever for all the deprivation mattered to Mr. Hanford. He had ruined one dairy business in this way already, and there were times when Clara feared that the Beresford Dairy in Tanner's Hill would come to the same end; but he generally recovered his sense of responsibility in time to recuperate at least part of his vanished custom.

Not least of his persuasive attractions for the boy was his love of reading; he was the only person, beside Mrs. Anstee, of Dick's acquaintance who was content to spend the evening discussing the instalment adventures of Deadwood Dick or reading aloud from Sherlock Holmes or the newspapers. In this manner they spent many an hour that might less pleasantly have been employed on the milk round, and Clara as often as not was left to do the scalding of the dirty milk-cans in the scullery.

Though he was drawn to him in many ways, and entered into his temperance activities with enthusiasm when they were in favour, there were things about Clara's husband of which Dick disapproved. He dreaded almost as much as Clara did the spells of drunkenness, when the dairy was neglected and only the stout fox-terrier seemed to know in which of his many favourite public-houses his master might be sitting; but he also, since it implied a certain disloyalty to Clara, disliked his professional gallantry with cooks and housemaids. "He's a married man," he used to tell them furiously while Harry, basking in the arch-banter which his flatteries produced, was putting back the empty cans in the cart, "as a matter of fact, he's my sister's husband!" But his disapproval had no effect on his employer, who continued to encourage trade in his own way and was known to the housemaids of Deptford and Brockley as "handsome Hanford" or "the mad milkman," according to the light in which they viewed him.

For accompanying Hanford on the milk round, carrying the cans from cart to door, and (theoretically at least) washing them at night, Dick received a wage of two-and-sixpence a week and his keep; the half-crown was his to spend, though out of it he was expected to make Clara a contribution towards his boots and clothing. It was meagre pay, and he was often hard put to it to find the money for a theatre or a temperance outing; but the work was not uncongenial, it was at least steady, and he was happy and comfortable living with the Hanfords. Indeed, if it had not been for the shortage of ready money he might have stayed with them indefinitely; but the need of sixpences and shillings was a constant worry.

The only part of his new work which Dick thoroughly detested was scalding out the empty cans at the end of the day. They piled up in the scullery in dismaying quantities, and the big copper had to be filled and the fire lit before there was any hot water to wash them in. The milk round itself was well enough, but scouring the cans was too much like drudgery to appeal to him; he discovered that it was easy to infuriate Hanford by insisting that his hands were not made for dirty work, and dawdling about in the scullery in the hope that Clara would help him. This, for the sake of peace, she usually did, spending a couple of hours over the milk-cans after supper to deflect her husband's attention from the fact that they had not been done; but Dick was as often found out and abused by Hanford for his laziness. The milk-cans were a source of frequent quarrelling.

However far he may have fallen short of Dick's conception of the ideal employer, nevertheless Harry Hanford was excellent company, and never more so than when he was "on the dry," and took Dick to annual parades and temperance meetings. In his sober moments Harry was a popular member of the Rose of Kent Lodge, the local branch of a temperance society known as the Sons of the Phœnix, and by the time that Dick was

sixteen had, by playing the temperate Dr. Jekyll to his fellow-members and discreetly keeping the drunken Hyde for Clara, been elected its chief noble. Benefiting from the near reflection of Harry's glory, Dick was without difficulty promoted to the position of lodge secretary, and drew an annual fee of eightpence from each member. At meetings he was addressed as "Worthy Secretary" and at festivals (usually the funeral of a fellow-member) walked in procession with a red velvet sash, adorned with a tinsel eye as a symbol of the preferential watch maintained by the Almighty over total abstainers, swathed round his middle. The processions were fine affairs, and he enjoyed them. Harry, in his capacity of chief noble, would be well to the front, handsome and cheerful in top hat and frock-coat, and Dick himself would occupy a scarcely less exalted position under a tasselled satin banner borne aloft on two poles by staggering fellow-members. Though he was younger than most of them and somewhat undersized, Dick contrived to make a good show in his best suit and stiff collar and the rich insignia of his office; he enjoyed the curious glances of the Deptford girls as the Sons of the Phœnix trudged back from the cemetery, dismaying the bus horses with their banners and holding up traffic.

Those days, indeed, when he and young Ramsey had scorned all female society were gone for good; Dick found himself susceptible, and before he had been eighteen months in Tanner's Hill fell deeply in love.

Edie Cockle was not more than seventeen, and pretty with a pathetic, wistful prettiness. Her gentle blue eyes, full mouth and tip-tilted nose made her seem prettier than anyone he had ever known; they became engaged, more or less secretly, and he saved up and bought a ring for her. Whenever they could (which was not too often, since the milk round occupied most of the day and Edie was nurse-maid to a family in Brockley, with the care of three small children) they went for long walks

together, and to temperance outings when these were available. It was privately understood between them that they would marry when Dick was in a sufficiently good position, but the possibility, on half a crown a week, seemed remote enough, and shortly afterwards, through a piece of almost incredible folly, Dick roused the resentment of Hanford to such a pitch that he was forced to leave the Tanner's Hill dairy for ever.

Since there was less sleeping space in the Hanfords' cramped rooms over the dairy than there had been even in the Freemans' cottage, they had evolved a makeshift bed for Dick in the front parlour, where, following George Freeman's example, they kept their savings locked in a small drawer in the chiffonier. The key to this drawer was one of a bunch which Clara kept pinned into the pocket of her skirt and never allowed out of her possession; but one unlucky night, when the weather was exceptionally cold and Dick had been complaining that he could not keep his feet warm, she took her heavy serge skirt into the parlour before she went to bed and added it, for warmth's sake, to the thin blankets under which Dick slept on the sofa. The following morning, having occasion to go to the parlour drawer for money, she found it locked as usual, but the money gone. There had been seven or eight pounds there in gold and silver, and she carried the alarm to her husband before the appalling thought struck her that Dick might possibly be responsible. Not daring to voice her suspicions, she said nothing beyond timidly informing Dick that their savings had been stolen, but as Dick also said nothing she had no good reason to advance against Hanford's immediate decision to send for the police. A policeman came, and gave the chiffonier the benefit of his professional scrutiny, announcing after a brief survey that this was no "outside job," as Hanford had supposed, but plainly the work of someone living in the house. The inference was obvious, and as the constable was able to support his theory by the discovery of

several small packages of money wrapped up in newspaper and disposed in the most unprofessional manner about the house, Hanford angrily accused Dick of having robbed him.

Dick did not deny the charge, but in the face of Hanford's rage became obstinately silent; only to Clara, tearfully entreating for explanation or excuse, he protested that he had not stolen the money, but only "borrowed" it. That was enough for Clara. The money was still here, the boy had been caught in a piece of foolish mischief, and that should be the end of it; but Hanford (who saw himself for the moment in the character of an injured benefactor) was violently angry, and refused to be satisfied with anything less than giving the boy in charge and having him marched forthwith to the police station.

It was Dick's second experience of the police court, and this time he was not in the witness-box but in the dock, with a sufficiently grave charge being made against him. Though he preserved an impassive face he was badly frightened, and looked imploringly across the court to Clara and Mrs. Freeman (Clara had summoned the entire family to try and talk her husband out of his vindictiveness) when his name and address were taken down and the charge read aloud by a policeman. The charge sounded more formidable to Dick, apparently, than it did to the magistrate, for when the deposition had been read out, describing the disappearance of certain money from a drawer and its reappearance in different places about the house, the magistrate looked over his spectacles in the direction of Hanford and asked: "Do you really wish to make a charge against this boy?"

What Hanford meant to reply will never be known, for Clara, before whose eyes the shadow of prison or reform school loomed like a nightmare, shouted "NO!" in a voice that made everybody jump, and covered the whole family, Hanford included, with confusion. The magistrate, justifiably irritated by the waste of time, dismissed the case, and Dick, avoiding

Hanford, went home with Mrs. Freeman. Harry's resentment, apparently, blew over soon enough, and before long we find Dick writing to him on friendly terms; but the break in their business relations was sharp and final. Dick seems to have been sincerely ashamed of the incident, for he took care to forget it as quickly as possible, and in later life, despite his love of picturesque personal anecdote, never referred to it. As to Hanford himself, he was too easy-going and careless a man to bear a lasting grudge, and some uncomfortable memory of his old embezzlements may have disturbed him: his ideas of honesty were at all events sufficiently elastic to allow him, several years later, to borrow Clara's savings for the purpose of going to Liverpool and sailing to South Africa with a mule convoy at the beginning of the Boer war, and disappearing both from the convoy and Clara's life with all the money and (she had reason to believe) another woman.

Released from the milk round, Dick's temperance associations stood him in good stead, and he got a job with a fellow Son of the Phœnix called McKay, who was a plasterer and road-maker. The work was heavy (mixing concrete by day and helping the watchman by night made even scouring milk-cans seem a pleasant task by comparison), but the pay was better than anything he had had so far; he earned fifteen shillings a week, which seemed a substantial wage to the boy who so recently had had to be content with five. One night, when he was helping the watchman hang the red lamps, a thin bearded man wearing a deer-stalker and speaking with a Scottish accent accosted him, demanding with an air of authority how much he was earning. Dick told him with some pride that he was earning fifteen shillings, and was surprised when the stranger, expressing impatience, told him that he was doing a man's work, and should ask for more. When he had gone Dick discovered from the watchman that the surprising stranger's name was Keir Hardie, and that he was standing as Independent

Labour candidate for South-West Ham; but beyond a feeling of mild astonishment this brief contact with the great Socialist leader left no impression. Observant as he was, and familiar with the unromantic realities of poverty, he lacked all the instincts of class revolt, and in later life, when success had lifted him out of reach of it, adopted a nostalgic, sentimental view of poverty. "The clean, decent poor!" he wrote in middle age, "their women are more wonderful than the daughters of kings . . . Starvation and dirt are not the hall-mark of poverty: they are the normal condition of thriftlessness." And again: "There cannot be much wrong with a society which made possible the rise either of J. H. Thomas or Edgar Wallace, that gave 'Jamie' Brown the status of a king in Scotland and put Robertson at the War Office as Chief of the Imperial General Staff. We were the poor who were not satisfied with our poverty; the lowly who grew to the stature of our faith and are growing still, I hope." Not satisfied! It is easy enough to-day to mark the unconscious irony of this attitude, the simple jingo complacency which measured the possibilities of a social system by his own ability to rise in it, but it should be remembered that he grew up in a generation which was not encouraged to think politically, at a time when the poor regarded the activities of a man like Keir Hardie with almost as much suspicion as did the moneyed classes.

During the early months of 1893 he employed his leisure in writing long letters to Edie. He also found time to visit Mrs. Anstee, for she was still the most satisfactory companion for the discussion of serious subjects, and as he was enjoying a temporary attack of atheism (he had been both shocked and relieved to hear from a reincarnationist that there was no God) there was a great deal to talk about. But after a few months the road-making job came to an end, and in a moment of impulse he went to Woolwich and joined the 3rd Battalion of the West Kent Militia. With a touching attempt at refinement

he ignored, when it came to filling in his "trade or calling," his recent road-making, and described himself genteelly as a clerk.

The militia, which ceased to exist as such more than thirty years ago, was similar in most respects to the force we know to-day as the Territorials. A recruit joined up for six years, being liable at any time during that period to be drafted to the regular army in case of war or other military emergency, but the compulsory training, in which the recruit lived in barracks and wore uniform, usually did not exceed three months. During those three months he received pay in the form of an enlistment bounty, and when the preliminary training was over returned to his civilian occupation, being obliged only to present himself for a short term of training once a year. The militia was a popular occupation with the young men of Deptford, and some of them had found that it could also be profitable. It was possible, if you changed your name when the preliminary training was finished, to join another militia battalion as a new recruit, and get your enlistment bounty all over again. A number of Dick's acquaintance had belonged in this way to five or six different battalions, and one enterprising spirit had joined and deserted from no fewer than fourteen, using fourteen different names and collecting fourteen bonuses. In spite of this inspiring example of business acumen, however, Dick went back to work as a builder's labourer when the training was over. The plasterer for whom he had worked earlier in the year was engaged on a speculative building venture at Clacton, and was willing to take him. It was not an attractive prospect, but since nothing better offered, and unemployment inevitably meant being a dead weight on the Freemans, he went, and was seen off by a tearful Edie at New Cross Station.

At Clacton, to raise his spirits, he bought a penny exercise book and began to keep a diary.

"First impressions of Clacton-on-Sea not very favourable.

Seems not enough Clacton and too much sea. Feel a bit homesick and a bit Ediesick. Took lodgings at Mrs. Growns's, 5, Alexandria Terrace. Had tea. After tea wrote to Edie, Mother and Clara . . . Went on pier into pavilion, admission 1d. Very good vocal and instrumental concert . . . It was hard to realise there in that brilliant lighted hall that underneath us the ocean rolled and foamed and roared . . ."

The work at Clacton proved hard, and his employer difficult. His hands became sore from the lime and plaster; he was always hungry; his wages were held back for weeks at a time and Edie's letters were infrequent. He found what consolation he could in the circulating library.

"I have been down here for three weeks," he wrote to Mrs. Anstee, "and am still alive. But thank God there is a circulating library (bob down security which is returned and 2d. a book) out of which I have had *Colonel Quaritch, V.C.*, *She* (2nd time), *Witch's Head* by Haggard, *Novel Notes* (good) by J. K. Jerome, and *The Naulahka*, an up-to-date Hindoo-Yankee tale by Rudyard Kipling and Wolcott Balestier . . ."

He also amused himself by composing rhymed epitaphs on the people he knew, and crouched over the fire in Mrs. Growns's kitchen writing in his penny notebook with a diligence that aroused her curiosity.

"You know, Ma," he told her, "I'll be a great man one day," a prophecy she implicitly believed; believed, at all events, sufficiently to preserve his notebook, pen and imitation leather writing-case (all of which he left behind when he fled from Clacton) for more than forty years—an extraordinary gesture of faith towards a young plasterer's labourer.

"Work as usual," he wrote at the beginning of October, "screening sand along with a new labourer . . . Went out along cliff, mile or so. Plenty of girls about. Not having any. None like E. . . .

"Work back-achey, hands rough. Expect letter from Edie

to-morrow. 'Hope deferred makes the heart sick.' Sent letter to Clara. Changed *Colonel Quaritch, V.C.* for *Splendid Spur* . . .

"Work sand screening. No letter from Edie. Absence makes the heart grow fonder. (Fonder of the other fellow.) . . .

"Shall join I.O.G.T." (Independent Order of Good Templars) "next week. Cussed dull . . . Last night (Sun.) was sublime. Calm sea. Moonlight night. Like scene from Arabian Nights. Saw plenty girls, d——n 'em. No class."

On the last day of the month he wrote: "Good-bye, October. You've been a long while going, but thank goodness you've almost gone. If ever a fellow got tired of waiting for his friends to write to him, I'm that fellow . . . Edie! Edie! Edie! ! ! what *does* this mean, no letter for ten days . . . Beginning to damn everybody and everything . . ." and then, a week later: "Ill to-day, had to knock off at 9.40. Lifeboat went out. No letters. There will come a time—but no matter."

He was, to tell the truth, run down and miserably depressed. Poorly paid and struggling with physical labour beyond his strength, he was worried about Edie and beginning to be despondent about himself. At eighteen he found himself, for all his growing belief in his own possibilities, apparently condemned to a future of casual labour and wretched poverty. His employer was frequently drunk, found fault with him on every possible occasion, and paid him only when he felt like it; he was so constantly hungry that hardly a day passed but he entered his meals in the diary with anxious detail. Bacon, potatoes, kippers, cocoa, potatoes, bacon. He began to feel, as he had done once before, when he made his unlucky decision to run away to sea, that unless he took fate into his own hands and made a determined break he was likely to go on in the same hopeless rut for ever. "I had no more definite objective," he was to write later, "than the man who finds himself at the bottom of a pit into which he has fallen—my one desire was to get out."

In this desperate frame of mind the memory of his three months in the militia, when the pay, however small, had been certain, and the food, though rough, sufficient to allay hunger, seems to have been strong upon him. In the militia at least he had not been forced to work long hours with lime and water in freezing weather for an employer who was hard to please and a pittance which was rarely forthcoming; there had been enough to eat, and congenial company in the barrack room. Shortly before Christmas, after worrying himself sick, he decided to run away from his employer and join the army, and wrote the following joint letter to the Freemans and Hanfords:

"My dear Father and Mother, Clara and Harry, and to whom it may concern,—

"I am writing this . . . to tell you that I have left McKay and struck for myself. I did not think that it would last long. The work that I hitherto have not spoken about is of the hardest description, and you that know my love of this kind of work (Harry especially) will know what a struggle I have had to keep at it for 8 weeks. My money will, owing to the shortness of hours, be reduced to 16s. next week full time. In the event of a very frosty morning or day I should have to stand off. But matters reached a climax this morning. McKay told me I was skulking, which was, my dear Harry, a damned lie, as it was too cold to skulk, and as this was not the first time he had made use of that objectionable phrase, I told him he was no gentleman or words to that effect . . . I shall shake the dust off of Clacton-on-Sea to-morrow (Sat.) and steer a course for Ipswich or Colchester . . .

"With regards to McKay. The only thing I can say about him is that he is slightly hot-headed . . . He was as much opposite me as Harry is like me. He hates books and novels and such trash and loves to talk about building,

plastering, Keene's cement as much as I adore literature and detest talking 'shop.' He is neat and fastidious whilst I am careless and easy. I expect Clara to be rather down on me for leaving, but . . . I have the future before me . . ."

He had more sense than to press for any arrears of pay, for that would have aroused McKay's suspicions. Instead he accepted a shilling at the kind hands of his landlady and walked to Colchester, where he pawned his overcoat and took the train to London. Here on Boxing Day he spent a last evening at the theatre, enjoying the performance of Fred Leslie in *Cinderella*, and the following morning, against the tearful entreaties of Mrs. Freeman, took the tram to Woolwich and enlisted for seven years as a private in the Royal West Kent Regiment.

Part Two

THE TOMMY

CHAPTER I

The Recruit

PHYSICAL particulars of the new recruit, duly entered in the records of the Royal West Kent Regiment, show him to have been small and undeveloped, anything but ideal material for the army. His age is given as 18 years and 8 months, his height 5 feet $4\frac{3}{4}$ inches, his weight 115 lbs., and his chest measurement 33 inches. He was undernourished and he had not finished growing. Entered at Woolwich under the unfamiliar name of Private R. E. Wallace, he was sent down by train to Maidstone Barracks.

The barrack square was a bleak, unpromising place, made up of old army huts and a brick building, and bounded by trees and a muddy playing field which ran down to the Medway. The new recruit was directed to a barrack room in the brick block, furnished with cheerless rows of iron bedsteads and hung with the draggled remains of Christmas decorations. On the edge of one of the beds sat an old soldier, pipe-claying his belts and polishing his brass buttons. "Don't touch them straps," he observed, by way of greeting, "or I'll gallop your guts out." In a small voice Private Wallace asked the way to the library.

If he had thought the army likely to encourage his literary interests, however, he was quickly disillusioned, for the library proved to be nothing more than a bare recreation hut, the only things in it at all resembling books being a couple of draughts boards bound to look like ledgers. Nevertheless the new life, in spite of discouraging beginnings, proved to be congenial and not uninteresting. He was provided with army boots and a

scarlet coat, his thin legs were encased in narrow military trousers, and he was allotted one of the iron bedsteads with an allowance of three brown blankets and a pair of sheets that had to last for a month. The men were friendly to the raw recruit, and put him wise to the etiquette of barracks life. He learned that the two forbidden topics of conversation were politics and religion, that it was an offence to whistle the Dead March in *Saul* or fix a bayonet. He memorised the different bugle calls and the distinguishing marks of sergeant-majors and corporals. The old soldiers shook their heads over his refusal to drink, prophesying, since beer was a natural beverage and lemonade merely ate away the lining of the stomach, that he was doomed to go out like the snuff of a candle when he got to India. But in spite of their warnings the new recruit persisted in his determination to remain a total abstainer, and was not backward in informing the amused veterans of Indian campaigns that drink was the greatest curse of the young soldier.

Parades and infantry work, once the first thrilling novelty had worn off, proved monotonous, but at least the meals were regular and welcome, and before he had been many weeks at Maidstone he was on sufficiently high-spirited terms with his fellow recruits to get three days' C.B. for "improper conduct in church"—an unspecified offence which was probably nothing more heinous than a fit of giggling. His painful thinness began to disappear, and as health and confidence improved he was enchanted by the appearance of a small regulation moustache, and developed the beginnings of a jaunty swagger. Army life, in fact, suited him. He was well fed and regularly employed for the first time in his life, and when he had been at Maidstone a little less than three months found a further opportunity of improving his condition.

Having lost a tooth in the course of picket duty, which included throwing the drunken militia out of public-houses,

he was sent to the Medical Staff Corps hospital for attention, and was struck by the difference between an ordinary "foot-slogger" like himself and the M.S.C. privates, who were the dignified possessors of dark blue uniforms, superior accommodation and better pay, and were further glorified in the hospital by the title of orderly. The comparison gave him interesting food for thought. Evidently in the M.S.C. one had a softer job altogether than in an infantry regiment, and besides, there were other advantages. A few months of army life had not diminished Dick's distaste for physical work; if anything, the laziness which had exasperated Hanford and annoyed McKay had increased, and was fast developing into an integral part of his character. Anything that could be done with one's wits was amusing, even easy, but the heavy physical routine of an infantryman was another matter. He remembered the old days of the St. John Ambulance, when rolling bandages and setting splints had been as skilful and entertaining as a game, and decided that to take up these gentlemanly pursuits professionally would in itself be a kind of promotion. Undaunted by his barrack-room friends' contempt for soldiers who mixed poultices he applied for permission to transfer to the Medical Staff Corps, and to his pleased surprise was quickly drafted to the M.S.C. depot at Aldershot.

Aldershot was infinitely more to his taste than Maidstone. It was nearer London for one thing, and it was possible on even a day's leave to go up to town by train and meet Edie, and spend the afternoon listening to Arthur Roberts from a music-hall gallery. This was a real delight, as different as anything could be from the boring drill and deadening routine of Maidstone Barracks. The warmth, the music, the catchy songs! He whistled them in the train on the way back to Aldershot, and amused himself with writing his own verses to popular melodies. Then, too, the work at Aldershot was far from dull. Anatomy classes at the depot were the first

instruction he had ever had that struck him as interesting, and he found he had quicker brains and a better memory than most of the beginners. When his period of training was over and he was sent to North Camp Hospital as an orderly, he was surprised to find himself dealing competently with an alarming variety of infectious cases, overcoming his repugnance to the handling of bed-linen in wards devoted to every disease from smallpox to syphilis. Freed from the boredom of infantry work his cleanliness, neatness and reserve made him an excellent orderly. He found himself flattered by occasional responsibility, and, what was more important, with leisure to read and a ready audience in the orderlies' canteen for the verses which really seemed to get better and better.

It was delightful to feel, now, that one was a little different from the rest, possessing talents which could be shown off at canteen concerts and among one's associates; delightful to sit propped up on pillows in bed at night, paper on knee, while the others undressed, throwing off from time to time a casual demand for something to rhyme with so-and-so, and triumphantly supplying the word oneself when one's next-door neighbour had paused, braces in hand, and said: "Blowed if I know," admiringly. The canteen concerts were a great incentive to verse-writing, for the recitations and songs were often neither clever nor topical, and he felt, with some justice, that it would not be difficult to improve on them. He had already had considerable success in the barrack room with comic personal verses about his companions, and for his first attempt for a canteen concert decided to embark on a theme at once popular and heroic. His choice fell on the recent death of Vice-Admiral Sir George Tryon in the sinking of H.M.S. *Victoria* off Tripoli, and he celebrated this melancholy event with a rousing jingle which was recited by the company's favourite elocutionist and gave the canteen audience as thorough satisfaction as it did its author. He followed this success with a

second set of verses, this time on the battle of Albuera, intended as a delicate compliment to the Middlesex Regiment, which had won great battle honours on that field in the Peninsular War; and after its performance had the heady triumph of being shouldered round the canteen by boisterous admirers.

The success of his verses flattered and delighted him. He bought several exercise books, wrote "R. E. Wallace, Compositions" with a flourish on their covers, and wondered how he could enlarge his audience. The North Camp Music Hall, where the men often went in the sixpenny seats on Saturdays, offered more ambitious scope, and when news of the Chitral expedition began to filter through from the North-West Frontier he made this the theme of another poem, and offered it to the company comedian as a new and topical addition to the repertoire of his Saturday "invitation" turn. "We all went," remembers one of his barrack-room cronies, "tanner seats, but Edgar was in the bob seats, front row." It was the sweetest triumph he had yet enjoyed, and in the flush of success he conceived the daring idea of writing a song for his London music-hall hero, Arthur Roberts, and sending it to him as an admirer's offering.

Hospital life, meanwhile, had its more serious side, and before he had evolved a song worthy of his idol he had a slight taste of the discipline which had helped to make life tedious in Maidstone Barracks. The Duke of Connaught at that time had the Aldershot command, and discipline under that conscientious general was rigid. Private Wallace found himself confined to barracks for two days for "not complying with an order," and again, presumably through some carelessness with belts and buttons, for "being dirty on parade"; and was reprimanded on another more alarming occasion when, carrying pails of water behind the hospital, he met the General face to face, and losing his memory and his nerve in the same moment dropped the buckets and saluted, forgetting that this is not the

conventional procedure when one's hands are full and one also has no hat on. The Duke, a stickler for detail, reined in his horse and "choked off" the offending orderly, reminding him that it is never practical to drop buckets and never correct to salute without a hat, and that the proper thing to do in the circumstances is to stand smartly at attention. Rebuked, Private Wallace did as he was told, and secretly admired the Duke for not being above noticing such insignificant detail. Three years later, when the Duke relinquished the Aldershot command, he crystallised this admiration in verse, remembering how his own small carelessnesses had by no means failed to catch the General's eye.

"Wot does the Gen'ral know? sez I;
Wot does the Gen'ral know?
'O, 'e's a Prince of the Royal Blood, an' 'e's on'y got up for show!'
But I 'chanced' kit inspection, an' thought it a 'cert';
But 'e put me down, smart, for a tunic and shirt;
An', insult to injury, checked me for dirt!
Did Arthur!"

The song for Arthur Roberts was finished at last, and under the title "A Sort of a Kind of a——!" was sent off, in great trepidation and without much hope, to Roberts at the Prince of Wales's Theatre, where a new musical comedy, *Biarritz*, was in preparation. Three years of soldiering had done nothing to diminish young Wallace's passion for the theatre; both money and leave were spent on spectacular evenings of musical comedy, sometimes in Edie's company, sometimes with a crony and sometimes alone, in the radiance of stars like Marie Studholme, Constance Collier and Hayden Coffin. His enthusiasm had even moved him, after seeing Coffin in *The Gaiety Girl*, to sing "Tommy Atkins," a song from the show, at one

of the Army Temperance Association's social evenings, and he was always ready with a topical number when conversation languished in the barrack room. But Arthur Roberts, with his lugubrious face and inexhaustible "gags," was his prime hero, and when the incredible news came that his song had been accepted by this prince of comedians he knew that nothing would prevent him from going to London to hear it.

A lesser enthusiasm might have been damped by the refusal of leave; by the fact that he was isolation orderly and so every bit as much in quarantine as the infectious cases under his care; but the author of Arthur Roberts's new song was not to be cheated of his glory by petty military restrictions, and accordingly Private Wallace, having disinfected his uniform (less, perhaps, as a serious precaution than as a sop to conscience) walked innocently out of camp one afternoon in the direction of the station, and, having decided apparently that he might as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb, enjoyed himself in London for five days.

He arrived back in Aldershot apprehensive but elated. He had heard his own song several times; had sat in the gallery glowing with the consciousness that the applause, little as the audience suspected it, was really for him; had been round to the stage door and discovered himself to Mr. Lowenthal, the manager, as the author of the new song; had had his hand shaken by this august personage (Mr. Lowenthal might have been more reticent if he had known that the young soldier had come straight from nursing smallpox and scarlet fever) and had been given some good advice and five pounds. His head was whirling with his own importance, and during those five tremendous days the possible consequences of having broken out of barracks dwindled to vanishing point. It was wonderful to sit on the packed benches of the gallery, gazing down on the yellow lozenge of light where Arthur Roberts, confidentially singing across the orchestra, brought all his

comedian's artistry to bear on one's own song, proceeding from verse to chorus with anticipated and delightful rhythm—

"You've a sort of a kind of a kind of a sort of a don't know where you are sort of feeling,
A no size at all feeling, dreadfully small, quite a crushed and choked-off sort of feeling:
You grin for a while in a curious style, but you feel like a thief that's caught stealing,
It's a kind of a sort of a wish the ground opened and swallowed you up sort of feeling . . .";

wonderful to steal sidelong glances at the rapt faces of the people beside him and think how incredulous they would be if the young soldier, sitting with round orderly's cap balanced on his knees, were to give them a sly nudge and tell them that he had written it; more wonderful still to let one's imagination play fondly with the future, envisaging a remote and rosy time when he should have made a great name in the theatre, and to-day's triumph could be remembered as a mere beginning. This was better than canteen concerts, better than those flattering sessions in the barrack room when he held his audience with long improbable stories, told with the gravity of truth while he watched his listeners under impassive eyelids, as Polly Richards had done in dressing-rooms long ago. It was better, far better, than anything he had ever experienced. His intoxication failed only when empty pockets compelled him to return to Aldershot.

The military authorities, as might have been expected, adopted a philistine attitude towards the young poet. He was picked up by the military police as soon as he appeared, and sentenced to ninety-six hours' imprisonment with hard labour—trenchantly known in the army as "half a packet". (A "full packet" was a hundred and sixty-eight hours.) Sergeant Ben

Hannan, who, thirty-six years later, as Superintendent of Police at Blackpool, was to meet this same culprit in the surprising character of Liberal candidate for that division, marched him off to the Aldershot military prison, euphemistically known to the troops as "the military academy" or "the glass house." This prison, in spite of its innocuous nicknames, was a heart-breaking place where the military prisoner (who usually went in, after all, for nothing more criminal than a breach of discipline) was treated with more severity and ignominy than any convict. He was put into broad arrows, his head was shaved, he was locked in a barred cell with a plank bed, was fed on skilly and potatoes and set to pick oakum. Even the oakum and head-shaving, Wallace found, were not the worst of it, for the following morning he was initiated into "shot drill," an agonising punishment which was not discontinued in the army until 1904.

For this the prisoners were marched into the drill yard and assembled in four lines, each man with a heavy iron cannon ball at his feet. On the word of command each lifted his shot breast-high, carried it four paces to the left and set it down again. The shots were carried four times to the left and four times to the right, when the back-breaking routine began again. Unlike most hard labour it lacked even the dignity of constructive work, and the prisoner's aching muscles were further tried by the knowledge that they were aching to no purpose but to exhaust and humiliate him.

Two days of this idiotic punishment reduced him to such a state of mental and physical exhaustion that the prison chaplain warned the warder in charge that it was folly to continue it, and the prisoner, whose physical stamina at twenty was not remarkably greater than it had been at eighteen, was henceforth allowed to stay in his cell and pick oakum.

The four days' imprisonment over, it was a chastened poet who went back to his orderly duty in the hospital, painfully

conscious of his shaved head and pathetically grateful when the doctor greeted him with a comprehending smile, and the men grinned and dismissed the incident as something that might easily happen to anybody. Nevertheless the experience had gone deep, and it was many years before he was able to forget it.

A few months later, promoted to second-class orderly, he was busying himself about a corpse in the mortuary when a corporal brought the stimulating news that he was marked for foreign service, and was to report himself at the depot the following Saturday. Troops were being drafted at that time to a dozen different outposts, and it was not for several days that he learned that he was destined for South Africa. He received the news with excitement. Aldershot had become dull since the disciplinary check on his song-writing activities, and South Africa, "the place where di'monds lay about the street," promised new opportunity and experience. He spent his last leave in London, saying good-bye to Edie, Mrs. Anstee and the Freemans, touched by their tearful eagerness to present him with new photographs taken for the occasion, and to make a hero of him. Edie, prettier than ever in her fresh white blouse and gored skirt, with a hard straw boater pinned on her fair hair and a nosegay of flowers tucked in her filigree belt, was the hardest to leave, and they exchanged fervent promises to write every week and to marry as soon as Dick's army career made it possible. From Mrs. Freeman he was able to part more easily, since he did not know that he would never see her again. He could not know, for that matter, that when next he saw Edie he would be a married man, with ambitions above housemaids, and no longer a soldier. On the eighteenth of July, 1896, he went down to Southampton in a mist of farewells and promises, and sailed in the transport *Scot* for South Africa.

CHAPTER II

The Caldecotts

SOUTH AFRICA, first seen from the deck of a troop-ship in the early weeks of a lavish and spectacular spring, was internally seething with political and racial hatreds. Only a few months before, the disastrous Jameson raid had fanned anti-British feeling among the Boers to explosion heat, Rhodes had resigned the premiership of Cape Colony and was sulking up-country in Rhodesia, and Kruger, not troubling to contradict the current rumours of war, sat hostile and implacable in the Transvaal. It was less a colony than a gingerly handled hornets' nest, and the Colonial Office, with an uneasy eye on the gold-mines and an anxious ear teased by incessant grievances of Boers and Uitlanders,[1] was less worried about which way the cat would jump than when she would do it. The Boers, an independent, Calvinistic and hard-fisted race, descended from Dutch emigrants of the seventeenth century, had, through two centuries of farming, trekking and decimating the native population, come to look on South Africa as their own, a claim which they were more than ever determined to enforce in their own republics, nominally under British suzerainty, since the discovery of the world's richest gold-field in the Transvaal. The British, second in the field and masters of Cape Colony through conquest, treaty and purchase, they regarded as grasping interlopers, and this point of view was candidly expressed in the Transvaal (and, to a lesser degree, in the Orange Free State) by extracting the lion's share of the tax

[1] The European, non-Boer section of the Transvaal population, chiefly made up of British, Americans, Germans and Jews.

revenue from the pockets of the Uitlander population, at the same time refusing to grant them either voting power or equal citizenship, and making naturalisation almost impossible. The British Government, less anxious for war than Kruger, the Transvaal President, who believed in his ability to win and had been encouraged in this belief by a political flirtation with the German Kaiser, was embarrassed by the Uitlanders' constant cry for redress and nagged by the thought of the immense potential riches of this self-governing state which, once it had delivered itself from the final authority of the Crown, would be free to annex native African territory as it chose and undermine the already ambiguous loyalty of the Dutch in Cape Colony. Ever since the ill-considered plan of Rhodes and Jameson (by which an armed force on the borders of the Transvaal and a simultaneous Uitlander rising in Johannesburg and Pretoria were to have combined in forcing Kruger to see reason) had gone awry and deteriorated into an unsuccessful raid, feeling had been malignant on both sides, and there had been no lack of inflammatory incidents.

Declarations of war were not actually to be made for another three years, but in August, 1896, however outwardly calm the situation might seem to a superficial observer, propagandist gossip of conspiracy and outrage were straws which showed which way the wind was blowing.

Excited by rumour and the hope of "seeing some fun," the young orderly arriving in the *Scot* hoped at first to be sent to Natal, the principal British garrison, and was vaguely disappointed when he learned that his destination was Simonstown. The importance of Simonstown, then as now, was as a naval base, and sailors outnumbered soldiers in the proportion of three to one. The town itself was unexciting, little more than a ramshackle single street running haphazard along the curving spit of land which forms False Bay into a natural harbour, and he was only half consoled for its obvious dullness by the

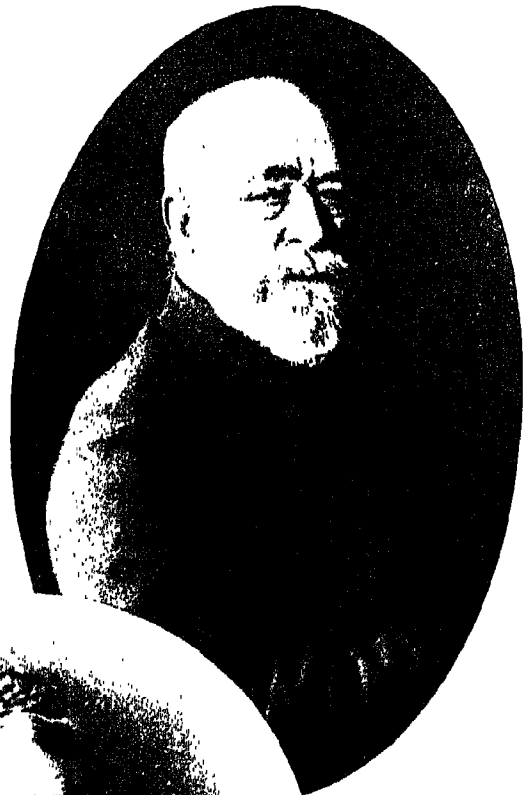
unexpected sub-tropical beauty of the country. The gardens of Simonstown and the abrupt hill behind it were coming into their first spring glory of lilies and freesias, and flowers undreamed of outside a florist's window were to be had for the gathering. One walked to the hospital down a long avenue of shivering grey-green eucalyptus trees, with eyes dazzled by the glint of the sun on the bay and the white brightness of the walls of Admiralty House. He was dazed and enchanted by the brilliant strangeness.

Hot and dusty after the delays of disembarking, the new orderly presented himself in Simonstown Hospital with just sufficient confidence to refuse, with temperance firmness, the beer which the heavily-moustached sergeant hospitably offered him. He learned that he was to share a tiny two-bunk room, squeezed in between the dispensary and the ward, with this fair-haired, cautious-faced man, who fulfilled the duties of cook as well as sergeant. The kitchen, which was Sergeant Pinder's province, and the dispensary, which was Dick's, were as clean as a new pin, and the ward, containing only four beds, was shining and empty. It began to look as though Simonstown, which rarely had the excitement of a casualty and handed on all infectious cases to Wynberg, were going to live up to its reputation of being the greatest "loaf" known to orderlies in the whole service. There was, in fact, almost nothing to do but keep the place clean, maintain a check on the medical supplies, scrub out the dispensary once a week and do the shopping. Though he cooked little, having only himself and two orderlies to provide for, Sergeant Pinder had long ago formed the habit of drastically spring-cleaning the cook-house every Friday, simply as a desperate measure for passing the time. He padded about the hospital on bare feet, bucket and scrubbing-brush in hand, complaining of the heat; Wallace, though he suffered cruelly from the heat as the summer advanced, was deprived of the comfort of going barefoot by

his horror of the red ants which invaded the hospital in battalions and overran the kitchen and dispensary. Among his other virtues Sergeant Pinder was a notably careful man, and soon initiated the new orderly into a method of increasing his weekly pay by two or three shillings. To do this one went without one's ration of meat and milk and drew the money instead; between them in a week they could save the price of eleven pounds of meat, and considering the heat and the fact that the meat came, as the sergeant put it, "from all round the beast," its loss was no hardship. Instead they lived on the fresh fruit and fish which in Simonstown was cheap and plentiful, and on occasions when the ennui of life seemed too great to be borne enlivened their evening tea with tinned salmon. One of Dick's duties was the daily shopping—barley for barley water which they drank abundantly in the heat, fish, fruit, bread and medical stores—and he went into Simonstown cheerfully, glad of the opportunity of wasting half an hour in the general store or watching the Kaffirs bringing up fish from the harbour. After tea there was nothing whatever to do. They lay in their bunks through the long hot afternoons, smoking and reading. Sometimes they lay for hours at a time and stared at the ceiling, too hot and bored to speak. Much of this leisure Dick devoted to reading Kipling, whom he had just discovered; to sketching out the beginnings of plays which got no farther than the first scene and were cut short with an irritable scrawl, "another blooming failure"; to writing verses which Sergeant Pinder listened to with the gravity of an examining professor. But even Dick's poetry palled on the hospital staff at times, and the cook's prophecies that there would be a war with the Boers within seven years, mark his words, grew tedious with repetition. Then Dick would take his Collins's Large Type Pronouncing Dictionary and go up to the top of Zigzag Hill behind the town, where he could stare out across the bright waters of the bay and learn new words for



Simonstown: seated, the frugal Sergeant Pinder.



The Rev. W. S. Caldecott.



Mrs. Caldecott: Edgar's "Dearest Madam."

the adornment of his poetry and the intellectual humiliation of Sergeant Pinder. He was determined to improve himself, and Collins's Pocket Dictionary was the best means to his hand; he went through it page by page, enjoying the words and the sense of power they gave him. He began to develop a racy style in his letters.

"There's a little Hottentot boy squatting outside the door with a cleft stick in his hand waiting for my letter," he wrote to Mrs. Anstee, neatly gauging the drama of the information, "there's a belt with a loaded revolver hanging up behind my door . . ." A few weeks later he was able to send her more exciting news, and flutter her kind heart with "the true story of how I nearly went to war." He had got no nearer to active service, apparently, than preparing to embark in H.M.S. *Blonde*, following orders from Cape Town, with an army doctor, an officer and sixty men, to proceed to Zanzibar; " . . . accordingly 1 officer, 60 N.C.O.s and men, a Doctor and ME prepared for action, but alas the action was countermanded. Three days later the following order was published: 'The details (as above) mentioned in district orders of 2 Sept. will proceed by train to Mafeking en route for Bulawayo and Fort Salisbury, there to be stationed for duty.' " They had nearly completed the first thousand miles of their journey, and were camped on the veld sixty miles south of Mafeking, when their instructions were countermanded for the second time and they were sent back to Simonstown, where the tedious inaction of the hot weather closed once more like suffocation round the hospital.

The intolerable thing about the place was that there was nothing to do. There was no theatre or entertainment of any kind, if one excepted the brothels, and no one dreamed of providing any other diversion for Her Majesty's forces. Drunkenness was prevalent to a degree undreamed of to-day, and this in spite of the fact that English beer was a shilling a bottle. (To get drunk economically one had to develop a

taste for "tickey beer," a powerful Dutch home-brew which, as its slang name suggested, cost threepence.) The only person, indeed, who seemed to think that the soldiers and sailors of Simonstown would be the better for some sort of recreation outside the brothels and saloons was the bearded Wesleyan minister, the Rev. William Shaw Caldecott, who had been transferred to the garrison some months before from the Transkei, and was already busy with plans for a Soldiers' and Sailors' Home. While this was being built (and construction, where it depends on charitable subscription, is peculiarly slow) he had established a temporary recreation room, and here, since it possessed a modest lending library, Dick began to spend his evenings, cheered and reassured by an atmosphere which had at least something in common with a temperance society. There were the same tea and lemonade, the same battered library books and naked tables; but here the resemblance ended, for the Simonstown Wesleyan Mission Room had a quality of its own, directly emanating from the personality of its guiding spirit, a woman whose bright intellect and warm vitality were of a quality rarely met with in any sphere. In the recreation room of a garrison town she was a phenomenon.

Marion Caldecott, the missionary's wife, was known to the soldiers and sailors of Simonstown as "Madam." She had been pretty once, but now, thickened by child-bearing and middle age, attracted more by her radiant friendliness, her look of piercing good humour, than by any beauty of feature. Her eyes, indeed, were still remarkable. Deep-set, blue, startlingly alert, they looked out from under strong, well-modelled brows and bespoke an honest, forceful, understanding nature. Her grey hair was brushed away from the temples and plaited into a little inverted basket on top of her head; she still had singularly beautiful hands and an upright, almost regal carriage. Her movements were slow without being languid; she was essentially an energetic woman, but ten successive confinements in

primitive missionary stations, where she herself had sometimes been the only white woman and often the only doctor, had inflicted obscure injuries on her from which she had never recovered. Her daughters ran about the parsonage, fetched books, wrote letters, made coffee, but Mrs. Caldecott sat upright in her straight-backed chair and drew life to her with the magnet of personality.

Almost from the first meeting Dick was aware of an aura of power and benevolence surrounding her, and was drawn at once into a warmth of attachment rare between a young man and a middle-aged woman. She was a new experience, a woman of charm and culture, who had read much and even written a little (a serial under her name had appeared in the *South African Methodist*) and who took an immediate interest in his own scribbling. She talked to him, chose books for him, encouraged him to let her see his verses. Undoubtedly she on her side perceived that this was no ordinary recruit, and that in spite of the thick boots and Cockney accent there was a flame of creative intelligence alive in the untutored mind of the young orderly which was worth fostering. However much Mr. Caldecott, disturbed in his Old Testament reading by the talk and laughter going on round his wife's chair, might scowl at the rash encouragement of a common Tommy and shake his head over the unnecessary friendliness of his daughters, the young soldier haunted the house with cheerful persistence, and made no secret of the fact that he regarded Mrs. Caldecott as his intellectual godmother—"one who is to me in South Africa what you were to me in London," he wrote to Mrs. Anstee, remembering how his boyhood friend had shared his delight in books from the free library, and had let him read aloud while she rolled out her jam puffs on the pastryboard.

The Caldecotts were the first family he had encountered who possessed that mysterious thing—a background of culture, and listening to their conversation and the gentle piano-playing of

the daughters he was drawn to them by the double attraction of novelty and envy. He was ill at ease in the presence of Mr. Caldecott, whose Old Testament harshness and family pride forbade any familiarity with a private soldier, but in the company of Mrs. Caldecott and her daughters he felt that there was no limit to his own possibilities. Florence, very grown-up at twenty-one and engaged to be married, flattered him by her kindness, taking her tone of gracious encouragement from her mother. Ivy, vague and shy, her fair hair always a little untidy because she was not yet used to wearing it on top of her head, listened attentively to everything he said and followed him with her eyes. Gladys and Nellie, still in their middle teens, teased him and romped with him. With the dour exception of Mr. Caldecott they seemed to him an utterly enchanting family, and if he said nothing about the girls in his letters to Edie Cockle and Mrs. Anstee it was because some obscure instinct warned him that sympathetic understanding between his two worlds might, through some future and only half-suspected change in himself, become impossible. He wrote punctiliously to Edie of the small events of hospital life, and vividly to Mrs. Anstee about native wars and punitive expeditions, the arrival of Sir Alfred Milner, the new High Commissioner, and any other event likely to interest her; but his own thoughts were centred on the Caldecotts and the blossoming of his own talent in the warmth of their approbation. Through long evenings on the parsonage veranda, with the white muslin dresses of the four girls glimmering in the dusk, he learned from Mrs. Caldecott the whole of their history.

It was a point of pride with the family that both Mr. Caldecott's maternal and paternal grandparents had first set foot in South Africa with the original British settlers in 1820. Settlers had, of course, reached the Cape long before this, and in the course of nearly a hundred years had made straggling advances into the interior, but it was not until 1819 that the Regent's

Government decided that the province was too sparsely populated for safety, and invited volunteers for emigration. Fifty thousand pounds was the sum voted by Parliament for the settlement, which was to consist of five thousand men and women sufficiently varied in occupation to make a self-supporting community; a hundred thousand besieged the Government with applications. "I have been liberally educated and brought up to the profession of surgeon," wrote Dr. Charles Caldecott, a hot-headed Baptist doctor, to Lord Bathurst, then Colonial Secretary, "but failing through want of means my family has had to endure for the last six months the most severe privations . . . Under these circumstances I have ventured to solicit your Lordship kindly to afford me your sanction in emigrating to the Cape of Good Hope." His solicitation being favourably received, he was given the responsibilities of ship's doctor on board the *Brilliant*, which with about twenty other ships sailed from the Downs on the 10th of December, 1819. William Wright, a Yorkshire Quaker, whose daughter eventually married Dr. Caldecott's son, was at the same time put in charge of a number of families in another vessel.

During the voyage, which lasted for more than three months, Dr. Caldecott's Methodist fervour caused some trouble, since he was fond of testifying to the chosen and unable to resist quarrelling with a rival preacher. "Having little else to occupy their attention," wrote Thomas Pringle, a notable Scottish emigrant who afterwards compiled an account of the settlement, "they engaged keenly in polemical discussions; and under the guidance of two local preachers—a tall, grave Wesleyan coach-maker, and a little dogmatic Anabaptist surgeon—they soon split into two discordant factions of Arminians and High Calvinists. Heated by incessant controversy for three months, many of them, who had been wont formerly to associate on friendly terms, ceased to regard each other with sentiments of Christian forbearance; and the two rival leaders,

after many obstinate disputations, which became more intricate and intemperate every time they were renewed, had at length parted in flaming wrath, and for several weeks past had paced the quarter-deck together without speaking or exchanging salutations." Arrived in Algoa Bay, where the settlers landed their household possessions (including, on the part of several of the more well-to-do families, several fashionable carriages, which, considering the absence of horses and the fact that the interior was penetrable only by heavy ox-wagon, seems to have been a rather whimsical piece of ostentation[1]), Dr. Caldecott gave further evidence of a rash and fervid disposition by deciding to walk to a Moravian mission station established in the bush some miles from Algoa Bay—presumably to see whether or not the Word were being preached to his liking. The heat was intense, and the distance greater than he had supposed, so that when he eventually reached the station and made himself known to the surprised missionaries he was in such a state of exhaustion that he had no more sense than to drink a great quantity of cold water—an imprudence which resulted in severe inflammation of the stomach, from which he died two days later. It was regarded by the settlers as no coincidence that his enemy the Wesleyan had succumbed meanwhile to a mysterious disorder, and had been buried near the beach. "Being the only individuals who died at Algoa Bay," recorded Thomas Pringle, "out of more than one

[1] "On my way I passed two or three marquees, pitched apart, among the evergreen bushes which were scattered between the sandhills and the heights behind. These were the encampments of some of the higher class of settlers, and evinced the taste of the occupants by the pleasant situations in which they were placed, and by the neatness and order of everything about them. Ladies and gentlemen, elegantly dressed, were seated in some of them with books in their hands; others were rambling among the shrubbery and over the little eminences, looking down upon the bustling beach and bay. One or two handsome carriages were standing in the open air, exhibiting some tokens of aristocratic rank or pretension in the proprietors. It was obvious that several of these families had been accustomed to enjoy the luxurious accommodations of refined society in England." Thomas Pringle in his *Narrative of a Residence in South Africa.* 1834.

hundred and fifty conveyed hither by the *Brilliant*, the event seemed to be viewed by their surviving associates as a solemn rebuke for the indulgence of that human pride and wrath 'that worketh not the righteousness of God.' At all events, the moral lesson was a striking one . . ."

His widow, left destitute with three small children, and in infinitely worse case than when suffering "the most severe privations" in London, was forced to settle in the new country as best she might. This she apparently contrived with some success, for thirteen years later one of her sons married the eldest daughter of the Quaker emigrant, Thomas Wright, and optimistically established himself as a farmer in hostile Kaffir territory on the Great Fish River. The Kaffirs, being as yet imperfectly informed of the advantages of civilisation, looked on the settlers as invaders, and lost few opportunities of harrying them, both by organised warfare and impetuous burnings of single farms; they had suffered loss of land and even slavery at the hands of the Europeans, and reprisals were frequent and bloody. By the time that his son (William Shaw Caldecott, who was to look with such disfavour on Private Edgar Wallace some fifty years later) was six years old the Kaffir raids had become intolerable, and it was only through the warning of a friendly native that he was able to escape with his wife and children before his farm was burned to the ground—a sight which the family watched with terror from the bushes only a few hundred yards away, their wagon having stuck in the mud, making flight impossible. This disconcerting incident seems to have turned him against farming, for he removed his family forthwith to Cradock and started business as a wool merchant, making for himself at the same time a respectable civic career which culminated in his being elected for three successive years mayor of Grahamstown.

The Baptist-Quaker household was conducted along the usual rigid lines of Victorian nonconformity, but its religious

atmosphere was not dense enough to suit the temperament of the mayor's son, who seems to have inherited all his grandfather's dislike of spiritual half-measures, and who at eighteen, when his father contemplated removing to the larger town of Port Elizabeth, sorrowfully recorded in his private journal: "Feel I am about to enter Vanity Fair." Disturbed by the worldly frivolity of the nonconformist community, he was gratified to receive the Call at a Grahamstown prayer meeting, and dedicated himself to the Methodist ministry. His father, not taking this self-dedication quite so seriously as William might have wished, heartlessly got him a job as a clerk in a Port Elizabeth wool firm, and here, in Vanity Fair itself, he found himself "the butt of many jokes and the victim of much coarse malignity." After two years of ill-concealed disgust at the worldly-mindedness of his fellow-clerks, he took the law into his own hands, and with thirty pounds, part of a hundred-pound legacy which his maternal grandfather, William Wright, had left him, paid for a passage in a slow schooner to England, and enrolled himself as a candidate for the Methodist ministry at Richmond College.

One of the tutors at the theological college was saintly Benjamin Hellier, a man for whom Edgar Wallace, meeting him in the Caldecotts' house in the minister's old age, was to conceive a profound and respectful admiration. "J. B. Hellier was a perfect man," he wrote to Mrs. Caldecott in 1912, ". . . I believe that much of the good which is within me came because I knew him. He is an everlasting barrier between me and atheism." For the young theological student at Richmond in the 'sixties he had more than a purely spiritual attraction, for before his preparation for the ministry was complete he had become engaged to Mr. Hellier's seventeen-year-old daughter. The engagement was a long one, for the Wesleyan Conference looked with disfavour on the early marriage of its young ministers, and it was not until he had

served a term on the Spennymoor circuit (where he suffered attacks of nerves from "excessive tea-drinking") and another in a missionary station on Mauritius, working through the terrible malaria epidemic of 1867 in which sixteen thousand people were buried in plague pits in the course of four months, that the young couple, risking the disapproval of authority, suddenly got married. As a disciplinary measure they were kept for some time on a single man's stipend, and began their married life in evangelical poverty. In Marion Hellier, however, the Rev. William Shaw Caldecott had chosen better than he knew, for she threw herself into the practical side of missionary work with zeal and good humour, accompanying him from one missionary circuit to another, and in the intervals of her common-sense work for the physical welfare of her husband's flocks cheerfully facing nine successive confinements in Mauritius, Malta, England, and remote native districts of South Africa. She was rarely able to travel without two or three small children clinging to her skirts and another on the way, and in spite of several deaths in unfriendly climates the young family grew and multiplied in the most unpromising places.

It was in the native mission of Tsomo, in the Transkei, that her most active and valuable work was done. She formed an association of more than two thousand native women converts, and, with a sense of the practical which her husband lacked, combined elementary medical and hygienic teaching with evangelism. Mr. Caldecott's missionary talent was, to tell the truth, of a doctrinaire rather than a practical nature, guided by the belief that heaven was "to be entered by faith, and by faith alone, without the performance of works of any kind." His own inclination led him more and more to Old Testament research of a scholarly and recondite description, and while his wife was always ready with advice for a heathen childbirth or a specific for a Bantu stomach-ache, he seems to have become more and more involved in doctrinal struggles with the natives'

souls and increasingly impatient of their bodily requirements. "Occasionally a . . . native . . . would find his way into [my] study," he wrote, "and on being asked what he needed would say 'Medicine.' The answer he invariably got was: 'Then you have come to the right place. What is your disease? Do you love sin? Are you a drunkard? Tell me your complaint, for I am a doctor of the soul and will prescribe for you.' The poor fellow's amazement and even alarm were ludicrous to behold, and he soon found his way out. But in one or two cases I got them on their knees."[1] Small wonder that, as he recorded in his devout account of his missionary labours, he was "often saddened by seeing little children and their parents hiding behind boulders or in dongas when they saw me riding or driving toward them; the reason being their belief that I could do them no harm unless my eye fell upon them. So old and widely extended is the belief in the power of the evil eye!"—or that the natives, pardonably confused as to the issues of Methodism, should describe themselves (as one of his converts did on a census paper) as "Wesleyan Heathens."

Simonstown, to which Mr. Caldecott was transferred as army and navy chaplain after six years of lightening heathen darkness on the Transkei, was his last circuit. He undertook it conscientiously, but without enthusiasm, for his affections were already turned more upon Biblical research than on the well-worn routine of a missionary station. The problem that occupied him was the reconstruction of the sacred buildings of the Hebrews; puzzled by the dimensional instructions given by God to Moses for the building of the Tabernacle ("And thou shalt make an altar of shittim-wood, five cubits long and five cubits broad; the altar shall be four-square; and the height thereof shall be three cubits . . .") he had long speculated on that fruitful source of embarrassment to Old Testament scholars, the exact length of the cubit, and, having formed a

[1] *Leaves of a Life*, by William Shaw Caldecott. 1912.

theory of his own, hankered to put it to the test by reconstructing the architectural plans of the Tabernacle from the measurements given in Exodus. To accomplish this, a visit to Egypt and Palestine was desirable, to study the route followed by the Israelites through the wilderness, and the traditional site of the Tabernacle. Research of the most deliciously intricate and commentary-ridden kind would have to be done, and in the barren parsonage at Simonstown he had a persistent nostalgia for the British Museum. He saw himself pottering learnedly in the Near East, bearded, spectacled and authoritative, free, as became an archæologist, of the claims of family and the evangelist responsibilities of the mission. He came to the garrison fretfully, his mind on the ark of the covenant and the measurements of the golden cherubim, and found it even worse than his expectations. The mission, he found, was "decayed and in a moribund condition"; drink, idleness and the flesh the preoccupation of the garrison. Even the old parsonage proved uninhabitable, and he refused to take his daughters (who had survived a childhood in the Tsomo mission house, where the chairs had sunk to their staves in the mud floor) into "so vile a neighbourhood." A new parsonage had to be built, and the need for a Soldiers' and Sailors' Home was too urgent to be ignored. His time in Simonstown was, as he irritably recorded, "largely spent in the composition of bricks and mortar."

Chafed as he was by frustration and delay, and the necessity of constructing practical buildings when he might have been so incomparably better employed in the theoretical reconstruction of the tabernacle, he was not, in the summer of 1897 when Wallace first came to the house, in the most sympathetic frame of mind for the encouragement of bumptious young soldiers with literary ambitions. He thought it frivolous of his wife to pay so much attention to the young man's callow verse-writing, encouraging him to make fair copies of his poems in an

album for her sister, and even going to the absurd length of paying him a guinea for a commissioned effusion. He did not smile when shown the mock receipt made out to Mrs. Caldecott in red ink, headed "Dr. to EDGAR WALLACE, Poet, Author. Poetry Written to Order, In Memoriam verses, etc." In his view there was no point in encouraging such nonsense. It was not, however, until the following April, when the young man was in camp five or six miles away at Muizenberg, that he discovered that some sort of correspondence was going on between him and his eighteen-year-old daughter Ivy, who had, apparently, the absurdity to regard the fellow as a genius, and was keeping up a timid and literary exchange of verses with him. The letters, certainly, were irreproachably formal, and the verses innocently confined to descriptions of natural objects, but Mr. Caldecott was displeased, and reprimanded his daughter. In return Ivy, faintly bewildered by her own temerity, continued to write and receive letters in secret, reassured, perhaps, by her mother's indulgent attitude towards the young man, and having as yet no idea how deeply, and even tragically, her life was to be affected by the young soldier.

She was a sensitive, reticent girl, the vague and dreamy one of the family, with a capacity for intense emotion which nobody but herself seems to have suspected. Only six months before, when she was seventeen and had not yet left school, she had suffered a mysterious breakdown of health, caused, as she herself recorded in her secret diary, by the death of a man with whom she had been in love since she was twelve years old. One is cautious of using the expression when speaking of a child, but the feeling between Ivy and a certain Mr. William Rowley Thompson, a friend of her father and brother of the resident magistrate at Tsomo, seems to have been one of those rare cases of genuine in-loveness which occasionally exist between a grown man and a child. "Enjoyed myself very very

much indeed," she had written at twelve years old in the tiny morocco-bound notebook in which she set down from time to time until her twentieth year her most intimate experiences, "but best of all I met Mr. Wm. Rowley Thompson, Mr. N. Thompson's eldest brother. He was very very good and kind to me and I used to go into his tent with him and help all I could and then he would take me on his knee and kiss me such nice kisses that made me feel all the rest of the time quite happy . . . Mr. Rowley is one of the dearest kindest niciest unseffish gentlemen I ever saw in my life I *love* him." A few months later, shortly before her thirteenth birthday, she had opened the little book to record a secret disappointment. "Mr. Rowley ill. We are *not* going to the sea this year. I don't think anyone knows how disappointed I am . . . Sometimes I feel as if I *must* go to the sea and dear Mr. Rowley. I think his illness[1] has shown me a little how I love him." Her birthday past, Mr. Rowley apparently recovered and the family had its usual seaside holiday. "We did go to the sea after all. I enjoyed myself immensely. Mr. Rowley was as nice as ever he could be and he spoilt me utterly and as to k——s! . . . Mr. Rowley came to Tsomo and stayed three days. He was perfection! He was with us a lot and the privelege" (presumably "k——s") "came off pretty often." A year later she wrote: "I have just heard the delightful news that Mr. Rowley is, they think, completely cured! I am so very glad and thankful. It is so lovely to know it is true." Mr. Rowley, apparently, was not insensible to the naïve charm of the shy and passionate little

[1] I am indebted to Ivy's sister, Mrs. John Wood, for the following account of the accident which caused Mr. Thompson's death: "Mother and we children were all travelling by ox wagon (Father was not with us) and Mr. Thompson was riding on horseback. We were being pulled up a very steep hill with a bank on one side of the road and a precipice on the other. Just as the 16 oxen got to the top, the chain which held them to the wagon broke, leaving only two oxen attached to the wagon, which began to run backwards towards the precipice. Mr. Rowley ran to the back of the wagon to turn on the brake, which struck him in the stomach—a severe blow which caused a cancer of which he died later."

girl, for on her fifteenth birthday she recorded unself-consciously in her notebook: "Mr. Rowley says he wants me to be a 'grand girl and woman, sweet and unselfish,' so I must try. He says he loves me too passionately and that he will never love anyone again as he has me . . . He calls me his darling and sweetheart and pet . . . It would have been impossible . . . for anyone to have been more loving and sweet than Mr. Rowley." A year later, a month before the Caldecotts moved to Simonstown, Mr. Rowley died, and in the shock of his death Ivy made a brief entry in her journal and a desperate attempt to extract some comfort from the Methodist doctrine of fortitude in which she had been brought up. "I cannot write about Mr. Rowley's death. No one can ever know what he was to me . . . My childhood is ended but I thank God that during it I was able to be some comfort and joy to someone, and I can see how truly and how much Our Heavenly Father loves us all." She kept her secret, but the strain told on her health, which was never robust, and five months after the removal to the disheartening surroundings of Simonstown she fell ill, and had to be sent up-country to Engcobo for three months to recover. "The shock of Mr. Rowley's death," she wrote in her journal, "and the self-control I had to exercise afterwards were too much for me."

Returning to Simonstown after convalescence she left school, put up her hair ("quite a young lady, though I still *felt* very 'juvenile' "), passed two musical examinations, and, exploring the new field of her father's missionary duties, "met real soldiers and sailors for the first time and very interesting I found them." In the same month she records: "First remember meeting E. Wallace," but after this the journal becomes reticent and allusive. Evidently there were developments which it was unwise to put down explicitly in black and white. "I do not believe (now I am older)"—she was eighteen

—"in writing down my inmost thoughts and opinions, but though, outwardly, this year has seemed uneventful to me (that is in other people's eyes) not one has been so full of new things—new knowledge, new desires and new views and ideas. I am no longer a child, with the innocence of one, but I am learning what a large share '*the flesh* and the devil' have in the world, and God grant I may not learn *how* much to my sorrow. Feb. 24 and April 13 are important dates in my inmost history . . . In March Arthur gave me my beautiful new bicycle." By her nineteenth birthday she was on sufficiently romantic terms with E. Wallace to receive a birthday poem from him, and a letter in which he kindly informed his "dear Miss Caldecott" that he knew "of no bad habit that requires overcoming to make you a perfect woman—to me you are all that, and the only text I can think of is 'Blessed are the meek!' . . . You are good and sweet and thoroughly domesticated—all this you know, and you are something else, which you probably don't, and which shyness and bashfulness . . . prevents my telling you." The poem ended with a generous recommendation of Ivy to the Almighty—

> " 'Twixt Dawn and Eve, our little day
> The sands of joy and sorrow run;
> Guide Thou this woman on her way—
> And let her stand at Thy right hand—
> Almighty God! Thy will be done!"

A few days later she took out her childhood journal from its locked drawer, entered the date, September 20th, and against it made a secret sign, resembling a sharp in music. It was a symbol of which Edgar Wallace, himself keeping a journal of a very different nature, was making occasional unexplained use in the margin. The only clue to this curious little hieroglyphic

is that it appears only against those days when he briefly records that he has seen Ivy, and so is perhaps significant of brief moments alone together, or even of kisses. Certainly by this time she was more deeply in love with the young soldier than even Mrs. Caldecott suspected, and was drawing insensibly closer to a relationship which was to haunt her with love and sorrow to her death.



Ivy: when Edgar first met her.

in Cape Town to the City Club and there met Rudyard Kipling and his father J. Lockwood Kipling – a fine old gentleman. I also met Mr Pocock of the South African College and Professor Hill. Rudyard Kipling has a very remarkable personality. He in appearance something like this.



with his father. He praised my London talk. Sir James Leeuwright in the course of a speech referred to Mr Kipling as the poet of the Empire, and spoke of the good he had done to Tommy. In speaking of Mr Kipling the Elder

He said "Mr Rudyard Kipling is the worthy
son of a worthy sire. Mr Kipling in reply:
Ignore of the future of South Africa.
I had a very pleasant time. Upon my
asking him for his autograph. He wrote
me a verse of the song of the ages.
He told me I had a splendid chance, and
his last words were "Mr Ford cake, donk".
Time is literature as a profession:
literature is a splendid mistress, but a
hard wife!".



The soldier poet: at the Caldecott's house.

CHAPTER III

The Soldier Poet

IN Ivy Caldecott's eyes, as in her mother's, Dick Wallace (or Edgar, as he preferred to be called in public) was now something more than a clever Tommy of whom great things might one day be expected; he had already, in a slight but sufficiently spectacular way, proved his talent with a poem in the *Cape Times*, which, since it had attracted the attention of Rudyard Kipling, had made him for the time being a local celebrity. The poem had been reprinted in a number of newspapers and had even reached London, and a few letters from admirers, addressed simply to "Mr. Edgar Wallace, the Soldier Poet, Cape Town," had been delivered with flatteringly little difficulty. Edgar himself at this time had no doubt whatever as to his poetical future, and was working hard, under Mrs. Caldecott's guidance, filling a succession of exercise books and albums with Kiplingesque verses, and even earning a guinea here and there with poems in local magazines and newspapers. The only disappointing discovery, indeed, to be made about what in the privacy of his diary he referred to as his "muse," was that the highest fee she seemed able to command was ten shillings or a guinea, and this, though he was still sufficiently inexperienced to feel a thrill of pride every time he saw his verses in print, whether paid for or not, was beginning to fret him. For some time it had seemed to him that his gifts ought to be somehow convertible into money, and it irked him that neither his conscientious orderly work nor his private verse-writing showed appreciable signs of making him any richer.

Some time before, during the Benin punitive expedition under Admiral Rawson in 1897, he had earned high commendation in the hospital when the wounded were being landed at Simonstown, and the little ward had for once been an active and overcrowded clearing station, reeking of iodine and anæsthetics. Admiral Rawson himself had sent a testimonial to the young orderly's good work to the General Officer Commanding in South Africa, and there had been a slight ripple of official correspondence on the subject which had finally petered out on the files of the War Office. The real reward of his work among the Benin wounded was a fund of second-hand tales of native warfare in Central Africa, casually dropped seeds of stories which were to germinate later in *Sanders of the River;* but at the time he had had no notion of becoming a story-teller, and his ambition, stirred by official approbation, had fastened on the idea of army promotion. Promotion from the ranks, however, as he soon found out, was a slow and laborious business, beginning with tedious attendance at the garrison school and the passing of elementary examinations; nevertheless in October, 1897, he had obtained without much effort a first-class certificate of education for corporal's rank (by no means a commonplace feat) and a second-class qualification certificate for sergeant. This was gratifying, but he discovered that the successful leaping of examination hurdles was not enough; it was also necessary to serve a specified number of years in the ranks before reaching qualifying service. There was no short cut and no back door to promotion. Private Wallace lost interest.

Writing seemed, after all, the better way of escape, and if at the time he could hardly have said what it was that he wished to escape from, he was conscious that the life of a hospital orderly left him unsatisfied, with a disturbing itch for creative activity. Egged on by Mrs. Caldecott, who had bought one of his poems for the little Methodist magazine which she wrote

for and edited, and who counselled him to study the Book of Job to improve his English, he gave away his pronouncing dictionary to Sergeant Pinder (magnificently explaining that he had "exhausted" it) and began pouring out verses on any and every occasion. He wrote poems for the birthdays of the Caldecott girls and sentimental quatrains for the albums of their cousins, filled exercise books with political jingles on Schreiner and Kruger and painstaking attempts at the *Barrack-Room Ballads* style, weaving neat rhymes and Kipling metres into the racy Cockney that came naturally to him, but which the Caldecotts' very different mode of speech had taught him dimly to distrust in conversation. He was certain that the verses were uncommonly good, and Mrs. Caldecott, though she criticised here and there and suggested alterations, was of the same opinion. Certainly they had vigour, a grasp of metre and energy of expression which never ceased to astonish her when he read them aloud; they were, indeed, primarily recitations for a Cockney voice; the involved dialect spelling of a few made them a little difficult to read, and grammar and even sense occasionally betrayed him, but it was impossible to hear them without realising how much they lost by not being "given," with gesture comic or patriotic, from a concert platform.

One of the first magazines to accept and print his verses was the *Owl*, a weekly Cape Town review of political flavour which liked to be described as the South African *Punch*. In its editor, Mrs. Penstone, he found an interested and sympathetic ally, who was not only willing to buy the poems he offered her but asked for more, and apparently found the poetical Tommy a sufficiently stimulating listener to hold forth to him in her office (as he noted in his journal with some pride) "for an hour and a half on subjects ranging from the colour question to ethics." Nevertheless it was not to the weekly *Owl*, but to the daily *Cape Times* that in January, 1898, he sent his "Welcome to Kipling," the most ambitious poem he had yet attempted,

written to celebrate the imminent arrival of Kipling in South Africa. The verses were topical, they were amusingly written in the Kipling vein, and—strongest recommendation of all to Edmund Garrett, the editor—they possessed the novelty of being written by a "common Tommy" as a tribute to the poet who had more or less made a corner in barrack-room ditties. Garrett accepted it on the spot, and wrote a long and helpful letter, pointing out several minor flaws and suggesting a useful alteration in the seventh verse. "I changed one word in 'R. Kipling,'" he wrote, "—'Pukka' for 'blessed.' I saw (was I wrong?) that you weren't satisfied with 'blessed.' It was weak, so you italicised it. 'Pukka' was at least a splotch of colour, and Indian colour at that. But it's rash editing poets! I used to belong to a little club of versifiers at Cambridge who edited each other. It helps." Delighted as much by the genuineness of Garrett's interest as by his acceptance of the "Welcome," Edgar hurried to the parsonage to break the news to the Caldecotts, and then went into Cape Town and presented himself at the office. "Some very nice things were said about my 'Welcome to Kipling,'" he wrote in his diary, "and payment was promised." For the next few days he lived in a fever of impatience. "Went to *C.T.* offices to see about getting 24 copies of to-morrow's *Times*. I have got an idea that my Welcome won't be the feature that I thought it would be. I had hoped—but hope after all is but a doubting faith." Nevertheless, when the great day arrived and the twenty-four copies of the *Cape Times* were delivered at the hospital, he found his poem handsomely displayed, and introduced by an editorial note to the effect that "Mr. Rudyard Kipling, who is expected to arrive by the *Dunvegan Castle* to-day, will be interested to know that the following lines are contributed to the *Cape Times* by a private in the Medical Staff Corps stationed at Simon's Town." The verses certainly looked very fine, and he read them over in a kind of ecstasy.

"O, good mornin', Mister Kiplin'! You are welcome to our shores:
To the land of millionaires and potted meat:
To the country of the 'fonteins' (we 'ave got no 'bads' or 'pores')
To the place where di'monds lay about the street
At your feet;
To the 'unting ground of raiders indiscreet . . .

We should like to come an' meet you, but we can't without a pass;
Even then we'd 'ardly like to make a fuss;
For out 'ere, they've got a notion that a Tommy isn't class;
'E's a sort of brainless animal, or wuss!
Vicious cuss!
No, they don't expect intelligence from us.

You 'ave met us in the tropics, you 'ave met us in the snows;
But mostly in the Punjab an' the 'Ills.
You 'ave seen us in Mauritius, where the naughty cyclone blows,
You 'ave met us underneath a sun that kills,
An' we grills!
An' I ask you, do we fill the bloomin' bills?

Since the time when Tommy's uniform was muskatoon an' wig,
There 'as always been a bloke wot 'ad a way
Of writin' of the Glory an' forgettin' the fatig',
'Oo saw 'im in 'is tunic day by day,
Smart an' gay,
An' forgot about the smallness of his pay!

But you're *our* partic'lar author, you're our patron
an' our friend,
You're the poet of the cuss-word an' the swear,
You're the poet of the people, where the red-mapped lands
extend,
You're the poet of the jungle an' the lair,
An' compare
To the ever-speaking voice of everywhere . . ."

Oh, certainly this was very good indeed, and would show even Mr. Caldecott that he was a man to be reckoned with. "I hear that the 'Welcome' has made me quite a celebrity," he wrote in his journal, ". . . there was I find a notice in *C.T.* of Wednesday, which referred to my poem as a 'capital poem' . . . 'I' returned from town to-day bringing very encouraging opinions concerning my thing. . . . Received cheque for £1.1.0. from *Cape Times* for poem. This day's *Owl* contains a very nice notice of my thing . . . What a happy life this is!" The greatest triumph, however, was to come six weeks later, when, as the celebrated poet who had dared to address Kipling in his own vein, he was invited by Garrett to the City Club's farewell dinner to Kipling. "Received invitation to dine with Garrett and Kipling. Whoop!" The whoop of exultation dashed down in the diary was a heart-felt one, for the "notion that a Tommy isn't class" had become an increasing annoyance and humiliation, and being bidden to the dinner was the first sign that Cape Town was prepared to lower the social barriers in his favour. Even with the Caldecotts, kind though they were, he had been smartly put in his place when officers came to tea; on those occasions he had not been invited to join the tennis, but had had to field balls for the others and eye the girls sulkily from a distance. He had relieved his feelings a little in a poem in the *Owl*, "concernin' Thomas Atkins, 'oo you all turn aht to cheer," observing with some acerbity:

"But Serciety don't call,
An' Serciety don't send;
Nor invite 'im 'ome to dinner, nor an afternoon to spend;
Nor the Gov'nor to 'is Ball . . ."

And now, here he was, invited to a really slap-up dinner at the City Club to meet Kipling. He rushed to Mrs. Caldecott for advice about knives and forks and some general coaching on upper-class behaviour. She gave him a practical demonstration on the parsonage dining table.

The evening of the banquet passed in a glorious haze induced by the unaccustomed wine and marred only by a certain confusion over fish-knives. He had been presented to Kipling, and had found courage to ask for his autograph, a tiresome request to which Kipling had generously responded by scribbling out a verse from the "Song of the Banjo" on club notepaper and writing "For Edgar Wallace" at the top. He seems to have been genuinely touched by the admiration of the young soldier, who, spruce and rigid in his private's uniform in a crowd of boiled shirts and condescending faces, concealed his nervousness under a show of poker-faced assurance which Kipling probably understood well enough. The meeting with Kipling was at all events magnificent news to send home to the Freemans and Mrs. Anstee. "Kipling was exceedingly nice to me," he wrote exuberantly, "and not only gave me his autograph attached to a verse of the 'Song of the Banjo' but wrote me a fine letter the following day, complimenting me on my 'London Calls'" (a poem which had appeared in the *Cape Times* the day before) " . . . He gave me his London address and said that he would be very glad to give me any advice that lay in his power. Wasn't that nice? My writings have given me a certain amount of 'tone' and I am received in the best houses, in fact I have asserted myself, and overcome the social barrier that debars 'Tommy' from getting a good many priveledges that he would obtain, were it not for his 'cloth.'"

Actually Kipling's advice, though kindly meant, had not been too encouraging. "His last words," Edgar confided to his diary, "were, 'For God's sake, don't take to literature as a profession. Literature is a splendid mistress, but a bad wife!' "

The great man's advice fell upon stony ground. The contact with Kipling, with the "members of parliament, editors, professors, etc.," whom he had glowingly described to Mrs. Anstee, had only confirmed his belief that if the future held anything for him (and he was certain that it did) it was through writing and writing alone that he would achieve it. Had he not already had recognition? Did it mean nothing that the *Cape Times* and the *Owl*, Edmund Garrett and Mrs. Penstone, took his work seriously and were eager for more? And why need it stop there? He was only twenty-three. Was it too much to hope that he might one day be a professional writer, wear civilian clothes and be free of army discipline, be a journalist, in fact, like Edmund Garrett himself? After much thought he came to an important decision. Writing was congenial work, and paid good money; the army, though well enough in its way, offered nothing. Obviously the thing to do was to snatch every opportunity of writing that presented itself, and to free himself from the army as quickly as possible. He drew up a plan of campaign and followed it breathlessly. He wrote a competition ode on the coming Grahamstown exhibition, in the hope that the success of the Kipling "Welcome" would be repeated, and his poem be chosen as the anthem for the opening ceremony; he bombarded the *Cape Times* and the *Owl* with serious, comic and political verses; he wrote "in a fit of insanity" to Cecil Rhodes for an interview, which he did not get; he sent a fresh batch of poems to London, to *Pearson's Weekly*, *Little Folks* and the *Daily Chronicle*; he persuaded Edmund Garrett to let him report a few municipal dinners and speeches in Simonstown; and he began to brood on a suggestion of Mrs. Penstone's that he should publish a collection of his



Medical Staff Corps orderly: 1897.

poems. Nor was that all. While Ivy sat up at night making copies of his literary efforts on the parsonage typewriter, he wrote to the editor of a Simonstown newspaper offering to supply news of local events, and to the *East London Daily Dispatch*, another Cape paper, resourcefully explaining that he was "the famous Edgar Wallace who wrote such wonderful poetry in the *Cape Times*," and suggesting that he should contribute a witty weekly article. The fame of his Kipling "Welcome" stood him in good stead, and rather to his surprise both offers were accepted. He spent his hospital night duty in an agony of concentration, covering page after page with pointed, erratic handwriting.

By these means he was soon adding between three and four pounds a week to his army pay, and his earnings increased only less brilliantly than his confidence. He advanced from general subjects to Cape politics, and was annoyed at being pulled up short in his denunciations of Kruger by a sharp note from the colonel. Nothing daunted, he wrote to the Naval Secretary at Simonstown, asking on his own authority for advance information of the movements of British warships for the *Cape Times*. The Secretary, with polite irony, forwarded the letter to the Military Chief Staff Officer at Cape Town, who, amazed at the impudent breach of etiquette, wrote on the margin of the correspondence, "Who is this whippersnapper? Have him called into Headquarters and give him a lesson in military discipline." Edgar was accordingly summoned to Cape Town and snubbed by the General. He received the rebuke with the same irritating calm that had masked his nervousness at the Kipling dinner, and shortly afterwards asked to be transferred, under the provisions of a recent army order, to the Reserve, where he would have a better chance of pursuing his activities without interference. This request, since there was every likelihood of war in South Africa, was curtly refused; but he also discovered that it was possible to buy one's discharge for the

sum of eighteen pounds, so long as war had not actually been declared, and in sudden panic flew to Mrs. Caldecott for the money. She was not, as it happened, able to produce such a sum, but she obligingly wrote to her son, Arthur Caldecott, a successful metallurgist in the Rand mines, and borrowed it. The application for a purchased discharge was forwarded to headquarters, and Edgar began to count the months to freedom.

Meanwhile he had redoubled his journalistic activities, and in the intervals of writing electioneering jingles for South African newspapers and Cockney poems for the *Pall Mall Gazette*, *Evening News* and *Daily Chronicle* in London, was preparing, under Mrs. Penstone's guidance, a small paper-backed volume of verses to be sold at a shilling. A Cape Town bookseller had been found who was prepared to finance the venture, Mrs. Penstone had designed a cover, and prefacing the collection with a deplorable humorous ballad on the Jameson raid, he had run as near to Kipling as he dared by calling the little book *The Mission That Failed.*

The book (it was little more than a pamphlet) was not a great success, but its reception was by no means discouraging, and it gave him the delicious satisfaction of calling himself an author, with at least one published book to his credit. He carefully cut out any notices that appeared and pasted them in his journal. The *Cape Times*, the *Owl* and the *South African Review*, from which most of the verses had been reprinted, reviewed it in glowing terms; the *Cape Mercury*, a rival paper to which he had not contributed, damned it. "Mr. Edgar Wallace," wrote the *Mercury* reviewer, "is doubtless an amiable and inoffensive member of the Medical Staff Corps at Cape Town, but why he should have gone to the expense of printing *The Mission That Failed* and other poems in book form is difficult to understand." Nevertheless, unfavourable as well as favourable reviews were impartially harvested and preserved in the little note-book; it was better to be mentioned slightingly than not at

all. "At present I hardly realise the importance of these notices," he wrote in his diary, "but I cannot fail to see that they will be of immense advantage to me in my future literary life."

His Grahamstown Exhibition ode was rejected by the competition judges, but with the detached opportunism which is the mark of the born journalist (and which had prompted him, a few months before, to write a tearful elegy on Gladstone at the first rumour of his illness, so that the *Cape Times* was able to blossom into topical verse on the morning after his death) he submitted it to a Grahamstown paper which returned the compliment by describing him as the "South African Kipling," and announced that there would be found in its columns "an ode on the opening of the Exhibition from his graceful pen . . . specially written for the *Penny Mail*." If he could not be the official poet of the exhibition, at least his graceful pen should describe it, and he employed a couple of days' leave in reporting it for the *Cape Times*, causing faint surprise among the other journalists by arriving in Grahamstown in private's uniform and staying, not at a hotel, but in the barracks of the Middlesex Regiment. He was not slow, however, to tell them that he would soon be free of the army, and one of themselves. "It's money I want, lots of money!" he told them, striding up and down the room where they had gathered to revive themselves after the opening with champagne and biscuits. To their amused question as to what kind of writing he proposed to do he answered: "Anything and everything that will bring in money." Already he thought of his army life in retrospect, and believed he needed only to be free to strike the bright ore of literary fortune.

In the Caldecott family, meanwhile, a storm was brewing. Mr. Caldecott, ostensibly for reasons of health, had suddenly retired from active ministry and carried off his wife and younger daughters to Plumstead, a suburb of Cape Town, where he could tackle the enthralling problems of the

Tabernacle without interruption. He would undoubtedly have preferred to have gone farther afield, to put Ivy out of reach of her ineligible admirer, but the little house at Plumstead, surrounded by a forbidding hedge of prickly pear, was cheap and convenient, and he may have hoped that even the short distance from Cape Town Military Hospital, to which the young man had been transferred after the indiscretion of his letter to the Naval Secretary, would prove a deterrent; but he had reckoned without Edgar's tenacity in the face of snubs, and without a new and unfamiliar obstinacy in his daughter. All through the last twelve months, when he had been pursuing his campaign of establishing himself as a writer, the intimacy with Ivy had slowly ripened, and the cumulative effect on Ivy of his various small successes had been to convince her that he was the genius she had always thought him, and that for his sake she was prepared to defy even her father's authority. One evening, when the Caldecotts were walking home from chapel, Edgar's thin, buoyant figure was seen hurrying towards the house from the opposite direction. They met at the gate, and Mr. Caldecott, piloting his wife and daughter inside, confronted the young man with a sardonic face. "Mr. Wallace, I would rather you discontinued your visits to my house." For a moment Edgar was nonplussed, and looked enquiringly across the gate to Ivy, who had turned almost as white as her muslin dress. "Well, Ivy," he said, ignoring her father, "I am evidently not to be allowed to see you again; so I ask you to marry me now. Will you?" "Yes, Mr. Wallace," said Ivy in a small voice, and fled panic-stricken into the house, banging the door behind her.

The repercussions of this extraordinary proposal were prolonged and noisy, and Mr. Caldecott saw to it that they reached the ears of Edie Cockle in London. From his wife, to whom Edgar had talked guardedly of Edie, he obtained her address, and wrote a crisp letter telling her that if she had any legitimate claim on the young man she had better come out to

South Africa at once and marry him, as he was clandestinely courting a Miss Caldecott. He earnestly hoped that the young woman would take his advice, and have the presence of mind to snatch her prize out of danger, but Edie, who, it must be admitted, after a steady engagement of six years had been shabbily treated, with commendable dignity returned her ring instead, and firmly declined to enter into correspondence. Mr. Caldecott's strategy had failed, and in forbidding Ivy to have anything more to do with Edgar he was no more successful. He shut himself up in his study in wrathful silence, paralysing the whole household with the emanations of his implacable disapproval.

Left in command of the field, Mrs. Caldecott, torn three ways between her sense of duty, her love for her daughter and her genuine affection for the young man whom she had done so much to encourage, did her best to persuade Ivy to obey her father; but Ivy, ill and miserable from the emotional strain, showed a determination which was not to be shaken. Even when her brother and sisters ranged themselves against her she still maintained, with tears and resolution, that if Dick loved her and wanted her she would marry him. Eventually, after endless scenes, a truce was agreed upon. Edgar's discharge from the army was imminent; he had got to start from the beginning in a new profession, so that for the present it was absurd to talk of marriage at all; would he and Ivy agree to drop the subject? Meanwhile the Caldecotts—or rather, Mrs. Caldecott, for her husband washed his hands of the whole matter—would give him whatever temporary help was possible. As there was nothing else to be done Ivy agreed, and Edgar, excited by the immediate prospect of becoming a civilian and a man of letters, welcomed the proposal. He received his certificate of discharge from headquarters (conduct and character "very good") and a gold-headed cane as a tribute from his associates at the hospital. On the twelfth of May, 1899,

he walked out into the streets of Cape Town in a new tailored suit, a pale felt hat tilted carefully over his eyes and the cane under his arm—a civilian, and a gentleman.

A little at a loss, when the first novelty of freedom had worn off, he presented himself at Plumstead, and rather to Mrs. Caldecott's surprise accepted her half-hearted offer that he should stay with them for a day or two until he was settled. She felt, perhaps, that he had been done less than justice, and was anxious to make amends for her husband's harsh behaviour. She may have wished, too, to observe the young man at close quarters and at leisure, so that she could make up her mind finally about him. Having him in the house at all was a tacit defiance of her husband, but she seems to have realised intuitively that the sudden estrangement which had followed the slamming of Mr. Caldecott's study door was, though unspoken, final. Whatever her personal motives may have been, it is certain that she acted also out of kindness to Ivy and Edgar when she offered him her spare room as a temporary refuge. Edgar accepted the invitation with alacrity, and stayed for four months.

What the atmosphere in the Caldecott household was like during that time one can only guess. It can hardly have been comfortable. Edgar, it is true, was rarely at home, coming back by the last train after reporting a council meeting for the *Cape Times* and rushing out in the morning with poems and articles for the half-dozen South African papers to which he was busily contributing, but all the time there was the consciousness of Mr. Caldecott's mounting wrath, which, though he gave no sign for the present beyond maintaining a Trappist silence and appearing only at meal-times, was eventually to erupt with the efficacy and suddenness of Vesuvius. In July, finding that his daughter was still living in a mirage of emotion and the immovable young man still clattering his typewriter in the spare bedroom, he issued an ultimatum. Either the whole question of

the marriage must be abandoned, or he, Mr. Caldecott, would leave the house never to return. Ivy must choose between Edgar and her father. Scenes, arguments and reproaches followed each other in exhausting succession, and while Edgar prudently made himself scarce in Cape Town and Ivy wept in her bedroom, the rift between Mr. and Mrs. Caldecott perceptibly widened. Mr. Caldecott, it seems, meant what he said, and with his mind on archæological excavations and the British Museum appeared almost impatient to be gone; Mrs. Caldecott, on the other hand, was drawn by the double tie of affection and duty to her daughter. If Dick were really worthless, she argued, then Ivy would need her; and if he were not (and she steadily and unshakably believed that he was not) there was no necessity for the family to be divided. In September, after weeks of argument, they came to a decision. Edgar and Ivy agreed to part for two years, on probation; during that time Edgar would have an opportunity of proving himself and Ivy of knowing her mind. Edgar meanwhile should leave the Caldecott household and Ivy go for a long holiday with her mother. This seemed a sensible arrangement from every point of view, and the only person who considered it with disfavour was Mr. Caldecott. He had not, perhaps, admitted to himself that the trouble over young Wallace was less a reason than an excuse for leaving his family. The household at Plumstead, with all its responsibilities and difficulties, he saw now only as a millstone round the neck of his ambitions. He received the new arrangement with a shrug of his shoulders, and for the time being said nothing.

The inevitability of his departure, however, was not yet recognised by the family, and Ivy and her mother set about keeping their part of the bargain by moving round the coast to East London. "My girlie has gone and I am feeling very sick at heart," Edgar wrote in his diary. "I don't think I realised how much she is to me, until I saw the train steaming out of the

station, and my sweet girl waving a farewell." Nevertheless there was a great deal to occupy him, and the letters with which he brightened Ivy's exile had almost as much to say about articles and poems, money made and opportunities taken, as about his determination to marry her in spite of her father, "were he the Duke of Connaught." He was able to write to her now on cheap note-paper headed with his name and the chaste Gothic announcement that he represented the *Midland News and Karroo Farmer*, and to send her his new variety of visiting cards, proving his connection with the *Eastern Press* and the *South African Journal of Commerce*. There were, too, most exciting possibilities to be discussed, for in the last few weeks tension between Kruger and the British Government had increased to a pitch where war seemed inevitable; and if war were declared, that surely implied a demand for war correspondents? He had talked to H. A. Gwynne, Reuter's chief correspondent and bureau manager in Cape Town, and wrote exuberantly to Ivy of his chances. Gwynne had been encouraging, and had half promised him a job if war should break out. He watched the newspapers in a fever of hope and anxiety.

Since May, indeed, the situation had been critical. Sir Alfred Milner had met Kruger at Bloemfontein in an attempt to reach some peaceful solution of the Boer–Uitlander deadlock, but the conference had broken up without result a week later. From that date the Boers had been deliberately marking time, determined to try their strength against the Government, but sufficiently shrewd to delay action until October, when the grass would be growing on the veld and conditions be most favourable for Afrikander methods of warfare. Early in September the British Government, perfectly aware that war was coming, drafted 5,600 troops from India to Natal, and appointed Sir George White to the chief command in that sector. Garrisons were strengthened and every possible preparation made. There was nothing further for Britain to do but wait.

It was on October 9th, 1899, that the Boer ultimatum, peremptorily demanding concessions which Kruger well knew the British Government was not prepared to grant, was handed to the British Resident at Pretoria. An answer was demanded within forty-eight hours, and when the time expired, as Kruger had known it would, without any attempt at satisfaction, a state of war existed between Great Britain and the combined republics of the Transvaal and Orange Free State. Immediately Cape Town became a centre of feverish activity. Transports began arriving in Simon's Bay and troops entrained for unknown destinations. The nervous elation and impatience of delay which follow any declaration of war ran through the city, and Edgar, grinding out war poems by the dozen in the stuffy office of the *Midland News and Karroo Farmer* in Shortmarket Street, was quickly infected. It was intolerable to be a civilian, useless and unimportant, while his old friends from Simonstown were being seen off with flags and cheering, heroes of the hour; intolerable to be stuck in Cape Town, writing at second-hand about the movement of troops when all the excitement was centring elsewhere. For a moment, chilled by a suspicion that in leaving the army he had backed the wrong horse after all, he considered re-enlisting, but a grain of caution held him back from so irrevocable a step and made him wait grimly in Cape Town for a more profitable opportunity. The opportunity came finally in the shape of a telegram from H. A. Gwynne, offering him the job of Reuter's second correspondent with the Western Division, and he snatched at the offer with relief. "If Reuter does not send me up to the front," he wrote in his diary, "what in God's name shall I do? I don't feel as if I have a ha'porth of moral courage left"; but Gwynne did not disappoint him, and with amazement he found himself travelling up by the night train through the Hex River Mountains towards De Aar, with a correspondent's pass and a hundred pounds for expenses in his pocket. For the first time, after six years in the army, he was to

see what war was like, and it was not as a despised Tommy or hospital orderly but as "Reuter's Correspondent with Lieut.-Genl. Lord Methuen," as he wrote with a flourish across the top of his proud letters to Mrs. Anstee, that he was going to the front. He was only twenty-four, and already had travelled an immeasurable distance from the boy who had sat in her little coffee-shop and read penny dreadfuls aloud behind the counter. He was in a position of some responsibility, he had the equivalent of nearly six years' soldier's pay in his pocket, and the world, presumably, was only waiting to read what he would write. He arrived at the Orange River in a state of pride and amazement.

A few days later Ivy, still exiled in East London with her mother, made a last entry in the diary of her childhood, carefully setting down a "faint and meagre history of a year that has brought me the greatest joy as well as more trouble and worry than I have ever experienced," before putting it away in the leather case where it was to lie for many years unopened. "Now I know and can say openly that Edgar loves me," she wrote, "and I know as I always did really, that I love him with all my heart—everything else seems to look small beside that great fact in my life. The truth is, my life is not my own any more—in fact I am in love! Dick is at present at the front—O. River. . . . Love is the most wonderful and blessed thing in the world and I can say and feel that, though I am really having a particularly hard time with regard to my love affair. None of my sisters approve—Father says if I marry Edgar he will disown me—Arthur does not speak to me. . . . Our house has broken up at Plumstead and resolved into its original elements and altogether it has been a most intensely miserable ending as far as most people are concerned. It is only Dick's love and mine for him that sustains me. May the New Year be a brighter one. This terrible war that is being carried on casts a cloud over everyone and everything."

Part Three

THE REPORTER

CHAPTER I

"MY PAL, THE BOER"

IVY did not exaggerate when she said that the war had cast a shadow over everyone and everything. Already, little more than two months after the outbreak, the yell of jingo exuberance with which the war had been greeted in England had subsided, and been replaced by an ominous murmur of surprise and foreboding. For the Boers, popularly represented as an ignorant body of Dutch farmers who had had the insolence to order the British flag out of their ridiculous republics, were having continuous successes, and the struggle, which should have been a brief and brilliant Aldershot manœuvre culminating in the firm planting of the Union Jack in Bloemfontein and Pretoria to the accompaniment of the national anthem, had so far produced a series of British reverses as humiliating as they were unexpected. Early and misleading victories at Glencoe and Elandslaagte, in Natal, had been more than balanced by the undignified rush with which Sir George White, pinched in on both sides of his uncomfortable position by the invading Boer forces, had had to fall back upon Ladysmith, which now, with its garrison of 13,000 and its 8,000 civilians, was completely surrounded, and settling down with mingled determination and dismay to what was to prove a desperate siege of eighteen weeks. Kimberley, the diamond capital, to which Cecil Rhodes had anxiously rushed on the outbreak of war, and where his opinions and advice were already getting on the nerves of the harassed military authorities, was likewise cut off, and plaintively signalling with the great De Beers searchlight to relieving forces which could

get no nearer than Modder River; while Mafeking, ugly little corrugated-iron town a few miles outside the Transvaal border, had been isolated and besieged since the first week of the war. General Gatacre, who with insufficient troops had been cheerfully sent off to check the advance of the Free State forces at Stormberg, had been defeated there on December 10th, with a surrender of more than 600 men; and the following day Lord Methuen, hopefully pushing north after three minor victories towards Kimberley, was overthrown at Magersfontein with heavy losses. Within four days of this disaster Sir Redvers Buller, appointed in the middle of October to the supreme command in South Africa and sent out to win the war, had suffered ignominious defeat at Colenso, with a loss of over 1,000 men, in his attempt to force the passage of the Tugela River on the way to Ladysmith.

This last reverse, inflicted on a general whom popular opinion regarded as infallible, a chosen Hammer of the Boers, had a far-reaching and depressing effect in England, and opened the eyes of the public as nothing else had done to the fact that the Boers were a competent and formidable enemy, by no means to be lightly undertaken. In "unpatriotic" minds the fearful thought had even presented itself that the Boers, who ignored the rules of the military game and cared nothing for appearances, who hid themselves in dug-outs and behind boulders and declined to present themselves to enemy gunfire in the gentlemanly British manner, might conceivably—incredible and humiliating possibility—emerge the victors.

The fact of the matter was that the Boer forces, mainly recruited though they were from an undisciplined pastoral population, were better fitted than the British army for the unprecedented kind of war that was being waged. The armaments which they had been quietly absorbing from Europe during the last three years were more efficient and up-to-date than those issued to the British forces by a War Office which, in

the beginning at least, appeared to regard the war in the light of a simple punitive expedition; decades of native warfare and shooting for the pot had produced a cunning and deadly marksmanship which left the British soldier, unimaginatively trained on conventional army ranges, vulnerable and bewildered. Mounted on their small and hardy Basuto ponies they were, besides, mobile to a degree that made the British infantry and artillery seem by comparison an immovable fixture. Then, too, they found it unnecessary to cumber themselves with the vast trains of baggage and equipment which dragged at the heels of the British; a Boer carried his rifle and cartridges, a blanket, a water-bottle and a strip of unpalatable biltong,[1] and slept on the ground without tent or groundsheet; his mount, accustomed to nothing better, foraged contentedly on the parched scrub and grass of the open veld. The British army moved laboriously, weighed down by equipment and stores, by hospital wagons, field kitchens, and cases of port for the officers' mess;[2] and Conan Doyle recounts that a battery which hopefully turned out its horses to graze "found that the puzzled creatures simply galloped about the plain, and could only be reassembled by blowing the call which they associated with feeding, when they rushed back and waited in lines for their nosebags to be put on."[3] The Boers, moreover, were not hypnotised by any system of military convention, and used both guns and men as expediency rather than etiquette dictated; they were also alive to the possibilities of trench warfare, and dug themselves into strong defensive positions from which, invisible and deadly, they mowed down the British troops advancing with fixed bayonets and useless bravery over the plain. They also shocked their opponents in

[1] Strips of lean meat dried in the sun.

[2] "Unfortunately Buller could only move with enormous transport, full of superfluous furniture for the camp, large tents, and luxurious provisions from Piccadilly for the senior messes." *Outlanders*, C. E. Vulliamy, 1938.

[3] *The Great Boer War*. A. Conan Doyle. 1900.

this "gentlemen's war" by employing the new and savage defence of barbed wire, in which the Highlanders, after the disastrous night battle of Magersfontein, were seen in the pandemonium of daybreak "hung up like crows." Thus, though the Boers were heavily outnumbered (Britain poured 448,000 troops into South Africa in the course of the war, against the 87,000 of the Republican forces) they possessed advantages which Britain, at first contemptuously inclined to underestimate the strength of the enemy, discovered finally to her cost, after appalling waste of life, humiliating reverses, and great loss of international prestige.

The field of operations to which Edgar Wallace was dispatched by Gwynne of Reuters had not yet, when he arrived there towards the end of November, become the scene of British frustration and defeat, and Lord Methuen, the General Commanding, was on the point of achieving three successive victories. The feeling at Orange River was one of optimism; within eight days, it was predicted, Methuen's column would have driven the Boers out of that last stretch of country north of the Orange River and have relieved Kimberley. Mr. Rhodes would be restored to Cape Town in time for his Christmas ball. It had not yet been realised that a force consisting, as Methuen's did, almost entirely of infantry, was of all things the most unsuitable for combating the "hit and run" tactics of the Boers, and the force at Orange River, which, as an optimistic war correspondent pointed out, was "designed to embrace the invaluable qualities of swiftness, mobility and strength," was still, with unconscious irony, referred to as a "flying column." For the northward push towards Kimberley, baggage, stores and camp equipment were reduced to what seemed to the general to be a minimum;[1] for supplies he proposed to rely on the camp at Orange River, and on De Aar Junction, farther

[1] Nevertheless, the transport extended over five miles of road when on the march



Reuter's war correspondent.



The first frock coat: Dewsbury, 1900.

down the line, where stores to the value of £2,000,000 had been piled up in the railway sidings, guarded by sentries. The eight newspaper correspondents whom Lord Methuen reluctantly allowed to attach themselves to the column were sternly forbidden to take servants, tents, camp kettles, beds, baggage, or tinned luxuries. Only four horses were allowed between the eight of them, and these on the strict understanding that they were to be used, not to save the civilian legs of newspapermen, but as pack animals.

Edgar arrived at Orange River the day after the column had left on the first stage of its push towards the Modder and Kimberley, and being obliged, on Gwynne's instructions, to wait there until further orders, set about equipping himself for the nomadic existence which, if popular prophecy were to be fulfilled, would last only a few weeks, but which might with luck be protracted into several months. The most essential items of a war correspondent's equipment were a horse, a Cape cart drawn by mules, and a native servant. The Cape cart, a light two-wheeled buggy with a hood, was necessary for carrying clothes, bedding, food, camera and note-books; a horse was the only means of getting about, and the native boy looked after the cart and animals. After the pleasure of carrying £100 in his pocket, Edgar was loth to relinquish the greater part of this splendid sum for such tedious purchases, but there was no alternative, and he fitted himself out as economically as possible. The pony, indeed, for which he paid £20, proved something of an embarrassment, for his infantry and medical corps training had not included horsemanship, and he found himself in the uncomfortable position of Kipling's mounted infantryman, with "three days 'to learn equitation,' an' six months o' bloomin' well trot." Before many days had passed he had procured a bicycle, and was bumping his way about the uneven veld while the horse grazed contentedly by the Orange River. The front, which pushed up towards Modder River at

a snail's pace, was not many miles away, and he was able to disregard Gwynne's instructions to the extent of visiting it on his bicycle when things were too quiet at Orange River, or his own curiosity demanded that he should have a closer view of the column in action; and in this way he watched Methuen's first victory, the battle of Belmont, from the crown of a neighbouring kopje. He chafed a little at being compelled to remain behind the lines while his superior, Reuters' first correspondent with the column, was in the thick of the advance and able to put really solid news into his cables, but there were nevertheless compensations. On the small hospital staff at Orange River were several of his old friends from the Medical Staff Corps (recently reorganised as the R.A.M.C.) and he spent several evenings squatting round their field kitchen, dining on stewed rabbit and bully beef, delighted with their mocking admiration of the way he had got on in the world. It was pleasant to be with these old friends again, men who had known him when he was a Tommy like themselves, and who still affectionately regarded him as their own. He decided that if he were ever able to publish another book of verse (and he was considering sending the best from *The Mission That Failed*, together with some later war poems, to a London publisher) he would dedicate it to the rank and file of the corps. At Orange River, too, he was able to make use of his skill as an orderly, for when the wounded were sent down the line after Belmont and Enslin, the hospital camp, ill-equipped and understaffed and anxiously awaiting reinforcements from De Aar, was glad of extra help with the surgical cases, and of someone who could competently take down from dictation the farewell letters of the dying men. Within a few weeks he was writing to Mrs. Anstee:

"My *very* DEAR MRS. ANSTEE,

"I am sorry that I have kept you waiting for an answer but the fact is I—am—a—very—busy—man. My proper

station is at the Orange River—at Zoutspansdrift—pronounced Zoots-pans-drift, which is just over the border of the Free State and about 14 miles from Orange River Station and 24 from Hope Town in an easterly direction. We have had several fights, as you know, the worst of which was over at the Modder River, and the house I am living in is simply riddled with shells and bullets. In fact when the rain raineth the blooming roof leaks like the dickens, don't you know, and then the 'gentle rain from heaven droppeth on the place beneath,' which happens to be my bed."

But life at Orange River was not, apparently, without relaxation, for there seems to have been a race meeting within reach, and on the strength of his £25 a month from Reuters he was able to shock and impress Mrs. Anstee by telling her that he had "won a case of fizzy—and lost exactly £21! But lor!" he added, "I am seeing life—and God knows a fair share of death."

Lord Methuen's apparently victorious advance, culminating in the costly battle of Modder River, was brought to a disastrous halt on December 11th at Magersfontein. General Gatacre's heavy defeat at Stormberg the day before had been an unhappy omen for what should have been Methuen's final dash to the relief of Kimberley, and Methuen's plan, a night march followed by a dawn attack, was a particularly ill-chosen one in view of the cunningly laid defences of the Boers, who had concealed their vast entrenchments behind brushwood and boulders, and were actually much nearer to the advancing Highland Brigade than their commander, General Wauchope, suspected. Without proper maps, and poorly informed as to the lie of the ground, the Highlanders advanced in the dark in close formation, through the added confusion of a torrential thunderstorm. They blundered upon Cronje's hidden forces unaware, and before they had properly deployed for the assault 600 of the

Brigade, together with their general (by whom Wallace had been reprimanded a few days before for an inaccuracy in reporting the death of an officer), were mowed down by hidden and deadly rifle-fire from the Boer trenches. News of the defeat, in which just under 1,000 men were killed or wounded, passed quickly down the railway line to Orange River, where Edgar was still chafing at his detention behind the lines and trying to supplement the thinness of his cables by dramatically written descriptive articles dispatched by mail; and it so happened that the news of General Wauchope's death in battle reached him some hours before it penetrated to the correspondents assembled nearer to the scene of action at Modder River. Wauchope's own warning, though, against any inaccuracy in the reporting of casualties stayed his hand, and he did not dare to cable the melancholy news until it had been confirmed beyond all question—by which time the news was common property at Modder River, and Edgar had lost the longed-for opportunity of stealing a march on the more experienced correspondents.

Most of the newspapermen with whom he had come in contact since the outbreak of war were already seasoned campaigners, and, in their own sphere, famous. G. W. Steevens of the *Daily Mail*, donnish and reserved, and one of the best descriptive reporters of his day, Edgar had encountered soon after the outbreak, when Steevens had been on his way through to Natal, where he was later to die of enteric in the stinking confinement of Ladysmith; he had seen E. F. Knight of the *Morning Post* brought back after the battle of Belmont with his arm shot away; had been snubbed by overpowering Bennet Burleigh of the *Daily Telegraph*, and in a fit of diffidence had refused to be introduced to young Winston Churchill (at that time acting as correspondent for the *Morning Post*), who with his flair for sensation and undoubted physical courage had achieved as much publicity as a successful general, through an escapade which in some ways was one of the most remarkable

independent adventures of the war. He had accompanied a reconnaissance party in an armoured train proceeding northwards up the line from Estcourt in the direction of Ladysmith; the train had been ambushed by the Boers by the simple process of tearing up the lines behind her and waiting with hidden machine-guns for her return, and in the pandemonium which followed the ambush and the derailing of part of the train, Churchill, who had lost his opportunity of escape on the uncoupled engine through staying to help the wounded, was taken prisoner. The Boer commander, somewhat sceptical as to the young man's non-combatant status, transferred him after many delays to Pretoria, where he was shut up with other prisoners of war in the State School. In the middle of December, learning finally that the Boers had no intention of releasing him, he scaled the wall of the school while the sentry was looking the other way, and walked nonchalantly out through the town and along the track of the Delagoa Bay railway. It was late at night, and outside the first small station he managed to board a slow-moving goods train and bury himself in a heap of sacks in an empty coal truck. His escape had by this time been discovered; warnings had been telegraphed to all Transvaal railway stations, and the train in which he lay hidden was stopped and searched. The very truck in which he had concealed himself was examined by lantern light, but he had buried himself deeply under the coal sacks and the guards passed on, satisfied. The train moved off, but he left it before dawn and hid during the day, resuming his difficult journey along the railway after dark, making long detours at bridges and culverts to avoid the sentries. At last, after considerable hardship, hiding by day and walking by night, he accomplished the 200-mile journey to the Portuguese East African border, and was able in safety to complete his journey to the coast, and from Lourenço Marques sailed for Durban. This picturesque adventure, ending at Durban with a flattering public reception,

sadly eclipsed anything which Edgar, hopefully wandering about the veld on his bicycle, managed to encounter; he lost his way a number of times, and more than once had to sleep in the open where darkness overtook him, without tent or ground-sheet, and on one promising occasion was stopped and questioned by a party of Boers riding eastward to join Cronje; but they disappointingly let him go again, and he had no hair-raising personal experiences to brighten his brief cables to Reuters.

The necessary shortness of these cables was a source of sorrow to him; there was no room in a shilling-a-word cablegram to describe the many details which struck him as illuminating or amusing, and he began to give more and more attention to the long descriptive "mail stories" written at leisure, squatting against the wheels of his Cape cart in the evening, smoking his pipe. He took great pride in these stories, and so that they should appear before Reuters to the best possible advantage was in the habit of putting them on the train to Cape Town, where a girl typist made fair copies, corrected the punctuation and sent them to London. It so happened that the *Daily News*, which, like most other newspapers of importance, subscribed to Reuters' service, published one of these articles "by Reuters' Special Correspondent" in full, and Edgar, delighted to find himself figuring, albeit anonymously, in a London daily, sent copies in his usual expansive manner to everyone he knew, including the Cape Town typist. This gesture had unforeseen results, for the girl, confused as to the identity of Edgar's employers, began early in 1900 sending his articles direct to the *Daily News*, and later, with a fine impartiality, to the *Daily Mail*. Edgar, preparing now on Gwynne's instructions to join General Sir Frederick Carrington's force in Southern Rhodesia, was ignorant of the fate of the articles which he dropped into the mail-box with as complete a feeling of finality as if he were dropping them into space; and when a cable reached him from the *Daily News* office, cryptically advising

him "SPLENDID ARTICLE CONTINUE ROBINSON," he was cheered by what he took to be Reuters' enthusiasm, and applied himself with still greater industry to his typewriter.

The journey to Beira, where a mixed force of Canadian, Australian and New Zealand troops under General Carrington was being landed for the purpose of cutting off any northward movement of the Boers into Rhodesia,[1] and also, it was hoped, to reach Mafeking from the north in time to support the relieving forces, was long, hot and exasperating. He journeyed down to Cape Town by train and embarked on a small and crowded troopship which took a week to make its way up the tropical coast of Portuguese East Africa to Beira, through which the British, by virtue of certain treaty rights, deeply embarrassing to the neutral Portuguese, were allowed to pass troops. Permission to pass troops and ability to do so, however, are two different things; the narrow-gauge railway from Beira to Bamboo Creek, a matter of sixty miles, carried rolling-stock almost exactly resembling old-fashioned London trams, and capable of moving very little faster;[2] the supply of trains was hopelessly inadequate to the number of troops, and thousands of colonials were kept fretting in Beira for weeks and even months before they could be moved.[3] At Bamboo Creek[4] they

[1] A possibility which had unnerved the Board of the British South Africa Company to the extent of insisting that the Government finance a force of 5,000 men, which the company offered to enlist, for the protection of their property.

[2] Even with "special facilities," Carrington was able to spur the trains up to no more than seven miles an hour. On one occasion a man who was accidentally dropped from a train caught it up after walking 25 miles.

[3] "The consequence was that during April and May there was an unmanageable mass of men, horses, stores and arms creating confusion at Beira and obstructing the single line of railway." *Times History of the War in South Africa.*

[4] At this disagreeable spot, "not the least unhealthy in a low-lying pestilential country, men, stores and horses had to remain jumbled up together until the limited rolling-stock of the broad-gauge line could convey them to the healthier highlands of Umtali or Marandellas. Nor was all trouble at an end even when a train had appeared. The railway staff were quite inefficient, the drivers were sometimes drunk, and the trains often left the metals or stopped for want of fuel or water." *Times History of the War in South Africa.*

were transferred to a broader-gauge railway which drew them laboriously through jungle and swamp as far as Marandellas, where they were packed into lumbering overland coaches (for which the coach contractor, a Mr. Zeederberg, had frantically rounded up all the mules in Rhodesia) for 285 miles; from Bulawayo to Ootsi, a further distance of 460 miles, they again travelled in relays by slow train, and were then faced with a forced march of seventy miles to Mafeking. It is remarkable, considering the inadequacy, exhaustion and delays of this method of transport, that any of Carrington's colonials reached Mafeking in time to assist in the raising of the siege; most of them, of course, did not,[1] but a small force finished their last march a few hours before Plumer's final assault on the town, and were able to engage in the five-hour battle which released the imprisoned garrison. Edgar, with the perverse luck which dogs the footsteps of so many war correspondents, arrived on the outskirts of Mafeking just too late, when "the powder of Plumer's attack still hung in the air." With curiosity and disappointment he entered the ugly little town which had withstood a somewhat desultory siege for seven months, cheered by the facetious inventions of Colonel Baden-Powell, and so determined to maintain the tradition of British imperturbability that it had organised baby shows, gymkhanas and Sunday cricket matches in the recreation ground—the last a frivolity which so shocked Snyman, the Boer general, that he had threatened to shell the town if it were continued. For two days he prowled about Mafeking, peering into the dug-outs and bomb-proofs in which the inhabitants had hidden themselves from bullet and shrapnel, listening to survivors' stories and liberally seasoning his cables with picturesque detail. London was avid for inspiriting stories of endurance and heroism;

[1] Two sections of C Battery of the Royal Canadian Artillery, with an escort of 100 Queenslanders and four guns, arrived in time to assist in the relief of Mafeking on May 17th, but hundreds of colonials were still congested on the Beira Railway by the middle of July.

Mafeking had been so long, and, it had seemed, so irretrievably besieged that its final relief had been the occasion of hysterical and unprecedented rejoicing out of all proportion to its significance. "From a mere tin-roofed village," says Conan Doyle, "Mafeking had become a prize of victory, a stake which should be the visible sign of the predominating manhood of one or other of the great white races of South Africa."[1] The British public, unaware as the generals that the war was to drag wearyingly on for another two years, accepted the relief of Mafeking as the last nail in the coffin of Boer resistance, and when, a few days later, Lord Roberts officially announced the annexation of the Orange Free State and Kruger fled to the undignified but mobile safety of a saloon carriage on the Lourenço Marques railway, it was only too willing to believe that the war was over. Edgar, like other correspondents who had trailed at the heels of various columns for six months and more, shared in the general wish-fulfilment, and began to think longingly of home. It was nearly four years since he had seen England, and now, with money in his pocket, he was anxious to be gone. It was only a few weeks since he had heard the melancholy news of Mrs. Freeman's death; he was saddened and home-sick. Not even the thought of Ivy, patiently worrying at Plumstead, could blunt the keen edge of longing; it was London he wanted, and the friends of his youth; Mrs. Anstee would be so pleased to see him, and Clara; perhaps even the Frisby girls whom he had not seen and scarcely thought of for thirteen years. He remembered Edie with a curiosity that was almost regret, and wondered if she were married. There was another reason, besides, for wanting to be home in the summer. Methuen's had accepted his new collection of verses, and had promised to publish it, in format as similar as possible to Kipling's *Ballads*, in August. If he were to repeat on a grand scale the small success he had had with

[1] *The Great Boer War*. A. Conan Doyle. 1900.

The Mission That Failed, it was important to be in England to enjoy his glory.

Orders from Reuters, sending him back over the weary Rhodesian journey to Bulawayo and Salisbury to report on a rumoured rising of native chiefs on the northern borders of the Transvaal, for a time frustrated him, but after several weeks of acute discomfort in which nothing particular happened he was recalled to Cape Town at the end of July, given three months' leave, and allowed to sail for England.

London, he found, and the Freemans, were curiously changed. London was war-crazy and unfamiliar, and without Mrs. Freeman the little house in Lewisham where they now lived seemed sombre and empty, as though its heart had ceased to beat. He learned from Mr. Freeman that the money he had sent her month by month throughout the last four years had been scarcely touched; she had frugally put it by against Dick's return. With its help, though, they had been able to give her a fine funeral, and this was a deep comfort to Mr. Freeman. The sons who had given so much trouble years ago were scattered; some were married and had children, one at least had seen fighting in South Africa. Only Clara remained unchanged, and she, delighted though she was to see him, was not in the best of spirits, for Harry Hanford had by this time disappeared with all her savings, and she was full of foreboding. In many ways it was a depressing homecoming, not improved by Edie Cockle's refusal to see him. She was married now and living not far from the Freemans, and in a reminiscent and sentimental mood he had written to suggest a meeting; but Edie, in the double strength of respectability and pride, would have nothing to do with him.

His book of poems, which he had not been able to resist calling *Writ in Barracks*, was not due to appear for another week or so, and there was nothing to do but make a lonely round of the London theatres and then go up to Ravensthorpe to the

Frisbys. Here, at least, the atmosphere was as gay as ever, and in the flattering company of the Frisby girls, now buxom young women, frank in their admiration, he was able to throw off his depression. At Ravensthorpe, too, he found himself something of a celebrity, for war correspondents fresh from the scene of battle, who could refer to Lord Methuen by his Christian name and had been very nearly present at the relief of Mafeking, were rare prizes in that little West Riding town, and the Dewsbury newspapers sent respectful reporters to interview him. The interviews made a fine show in the papers next day; the *Dewsbury District News* ran a couple of columns, from which its readers ascertained that Mr. Edgar Wallace was "a gentleman who knows a good deal about what has taken place in South Africa," that he had "an amount of literary talent" and had "travelled well on the high road to success"; also that he was "not imbued with a high idea of the utility" of General Carrington's column. A second Dewsbury paper, scorning to rely quite as fully as the *District News* on quotations from Edgar's articles, asked his opinion as to the best way of settling the Boer republics now that they were as good as conquered, and had the satisfaction of being able to announce that "Mr. Wallace advocated annexation." He was "sanguine that after two or three years under British rule the burghers will find our regime better for them than the corrupt Boer Oligarchy." The Boers, as it happened, obstinately refusing to recognise the end of the war, and singularly unmoved by Lord Roberts's official annexation of their territory, were at this time actually preparing a new campaign, by which they hoped to realise what Edgar so impressed the Dewsbury reporter by calling "the mad dream of driving the Englishmen into the sea"; but the possibility of exhausting and long-drawn guerrilla warfare was not to be envisaged by a country which had not yet recovered from the intoxication of Mafeking. The hangover had not yet set in, and optimistic prophecy was easy and splendid.

Only his anxiety to be in London when his book appeared finally dislodged him from Ravensthorpe, where for the first time he had enjoyed the superb sensation of being lionised, and had been delighted, too, to renew acquaintance with the Hirst girls, the Frisbys' neighbours, who had grown into young women of disturbing vivacity and attraction. He promised to spend a full month in Ravensthorpe before he went back to South Africa, and returned to London to buy a large album and await the sensational impact of *Writ in Barracks*.

The publishers, relying on the war-time adulation of "Tommy Atkins," and the sentimental appetite for verses glorifying that popular abstraction, had given a printing order for 2,000 copies. Unhappily, though the public had not yet swallowed too many "Tommy" poems for its taste, the reviewers had, and Edgar's Kiplingesque volume was received by the press somewhat harshly. The South African war had kept Kipling's own muse busier than usual, and music-halls and concert platforms rocked with the military enthusiasms of his imitators. One more volume, to some reviewers at least, was one too many. They did not hesitate to say so. "How long," moaned one hard-pressed critic plaintively, "how long . . . will British patriotism find its most vigorous expression in these khaki-coster rhythms, these music-hall sentiments, and this extremely facile vein of brag?" "Not Kipling himself," said the *Daily Chronicle*, with nicely calculated malice, "could have shown a meaner triumph over a brave and fallen enemy than Mr. Wallace in 'My Pal, the Boer.' . . . If only the poet (for the man has poetry)—if only he would leave politics and empire and the Royal Family and the British Deity alone for ever!" The *Star* was sarcastic and the *Standard* thought it "a pity so much of his verses should be a mere *réchauffé* of the second-hand swagger about 'Tommy' of which we have had rather too much already," and deprecated the "perfunctory imperialism which leads him to talk of Mr. Rhodes in language which would be

exaggerated if applied to Nelson after Trafalgar." The *Manchester Guardian* paternally advised him to "give Tommy a well-earned rest." Even the *Daily Mail*, which might have been relied upon to approve his sentiments, if not his poetry, attempted a lofty excuse for his earlier verses having appeared in Harmsworth publications. "Though Mr. Wallace's rhymes," it pointed out, "being essentially journalism, deserved the places they have held in our newspapers, we do not think that they were ever worth collecting between two covers," and the *Mail* reviewer, who appears to have had only a hazy idea of the title of the book he was reviewing, concluded severely: "The truth is, imitation is not far from parody, and we can only regard Mr. Wallace's *When in Barracks* as a book which had better not have been published." Some of the newspapers were a little kinder. *Country Life* ventured a cautious prophecy that "if Edgar Wallace does not allow the literary agents to get hold of him and persuade him into over-production, he will go far"; while the *Evening News*, modestly reminding its readers that a number of the poems had already appeared in its own columns, where they had "attracted a good deal of attention by their remarkable freshness, strength and grip," conceded that though they were not "great or epic," they were "the sort of thing that will go home to men's hearts." It would be a mistake, cautioned the *News*, "to imagine because he has written so well of stirring and moving things that have passed before his eyes that Mr. Wallace is a great literary genius. But he has skill beyond the common, and he is very, very human." The more staid reviews were offended by the Cockney idiom in which, following the Kipling pattern, so many of the poems had painstakingly been written. His observation of human nature, the *Saturday Review* commented primly, was "something obscured by a cloud of dropped aspirates"; while the *Athenæum*, booming from remote heights, complained that "even in soldier songs one does not care for pronouns whose substantives have been mislaid."

It was all very depressing. The poems he had written with such care and pride, and which the Caldecotts and his other friends had admired, too, and thought wonderful, had at last reached the critical public he had long desired for them, and had been rejected. The truth of the matter was that whereas in South Africa, as the productions of a soldier in the ranks, his poems had been remarkable and full of promise, as the work of a poet claiming recognition on his own merits from the London critics, it seemed no better than it really was—neat, imitative, jingling verse embodying facile, obvious, and sometimes vulgar sentiments. A little crushed, he cut out the reviews as they appeared, and with scrupulous fairness pasted them carefully into the handsome album he had prepared for them. Of the 2,000 copies which Methuen had so optimistically issued 977 were sold and 926 remaindered. Edgar received £15 15s. 11d. in royalties. Sadly deflated, he went back to spend his last month of leave in the soothing company of the Hirsts and Frisbys.

The jolly family living over the baker's shop, and, even more, the attractive company of their neighbours, the Hirst sisters, did much to restore his usual high spirits. They were not in the habit of reading book reviews, and accepted autographed copies of his book with delighted blushes. He spent more time with the Hirsts than was perhaps quite mannerly to his hosts, but Laurie and Julia, lively, intelligent and quite distractingly pretty, were such splendid company that he found it difficult to tear himself away from them. They were well-read young women, full of enthusiasm for Dickens, Meredith and the Brontës, and they spent glowing evenings reading aloud to him by the parlour fire. Julia, the younger and prettier, was a passable pianist, and asked nothing better than to "play her fingers off" for him in endless songs and choruses from *San Toy* and *Floradora*, which Edgar had seen and fallen in love with in London. Sometimes, indeed, a sudden depression of spirits would overwhelm him, but even then it was almost a pleasure

to hint darkly at troubles and difficulties, with two such sympathetic listeners eager to comfort and advise him. He seems at this time to have entertained some doubts as to the real nature of his feelings for Ivy; after so many months of absence, and in such congenial company, it is possible that her image had become a little dim: certainly, though he described the Caldecotts, he failed to mention the fact of his engagement. It was a curious omission, but his reticence was no doubt also due to his awareness that the figure he cut in Ravensthorpe was both dashing and romantic. At twenty-five he had become a handsome young man, with fine eyes, clear-cut features and a baffling expression. He wore his moustache fierce and full in the military fashion, and a year of civilian life had done nothing to impair his jaunty carriage. He was evidently conscious of his good appearance, for he liberally distributed photographs of his profile among the girls, and even went to the length of paying a special visit to the photographer in Dewsbury, for the purpose of being taken in his frock-coat and top hat, with umbrella neatly rolled and one doe-skin glove worn and one carried—a proud but disconcerting occasion, since he appeared in the finished prints in the guise of a conscientious undertaker who had just thought of something deeply embarrassing.

On his last day in Ravensthorpe, coming home from a walk through the autumn evening with Laurie and Julia, and touched, perhaps, by the romantic melancholy of all such partings, he was moved to take Julia's hand, and, speaking with genuine regret of his return to South Africa, asked her in diffident terms whether she would "wait for" him. But Julia, emotionally drawn to him though she was, and deeply under the spell of his personality, decorously replied that she was too young to think of marriage; and Edgar, suddenly conscious, perhaps, of disloyalty to Ivy, did not press her. They walked on to Ravensthorpe in silence. Next day, before leaving for the station, he gave her a farewell photograph—one of his best.

On it he had written a line from a chorus in *Floradora* which had amused them because it had been so apt:

"And all I say
Is in the *Daily Mail* next day!"

Neither Laurie nor Julia ever saw him again.

The prophecy written on Julia's photograph had some foundation in fact, but even Edgar had no idea what an important step his new association with the *Daily Mail* was destined to be. In London he had met a man who claimed to have seen a signed article of his in that paper, and Edgar, frankly incredulous, had gone down to Carmelite House to see if he could trace it. There, on the June file, he had found a long descriptive article on the painful journey "With Carrington Through Rhodesia," and there, sure enough, was his name on it. He recognised it as one of the accounts on which he had spent so much time and care, and had sent to the Cape Town typist to forward to Reuters. This, then, was some more of her extraordinary handiwork. He had already come across unaccountable signed articles of his own in the *Daily News* which had certainly not got there by way of Reuters, and he concluded that she must have sent this solitary article to the *Mail* out of sheer high spirits. Standing in the library with his hat pushed up from his forehead, he read it again, carefully. It was an excellent article. He had forgotten how vivid and amusing it had been, and what sound sense and grasp of affairs had showed through the comic descriptions of the people in the railway carriage. He read it critically, with admiration and surprise, and on a sudden impulse sent up his name to the editor. If one article were good enough to appear in the *Daily Mail*, why not more? He found himself shown into the handsome presence of Thomas Marlowe.

Tom Marlowe, one of the shrewdest and best editors the *Mail*





Daily Mail war correspondent: 1900.

has ever had, received him non-committally. He remembered the article, which had dropped into the foreign editor's lap apparently from nowhere, and the fact that he had liked it; the young fellow could write, that was quite evident, and his successful six months with Reuters proved that he knew what he was talking about. Marlowe regarded him steadily from under grey eyebrows while Edgar, fidgeting with gloves and stick to give himself confidence, affirmed that in his opinion the war would last for at least another year, that De Wet's dashing guerrilla campaign, launched since Edgar had left the Cape, was likely to prove serious, and certainly beyond the control of any military police, which was all that was popularly supposed necessary to tidy up the troublesome details which might follow British victory and annexation. He also hinted that his own talents were really better suited to the writing of long descriptive articles for the *Mail* than to painfully compressed cablegrams for Reuters. But Marlowe, sensibly enough, was cautious. He invited Edgar to send in "a few articles" when he got back to the Cape, and then, perhaps, they would see . . . Edgar sailed for South Africa in a more hopeful, though still melancholy frame of mind.

"Dear little girl," he wrote to Laurie Hirst on the journey, "sometimes I want somebody to whom I can confide my little troubles, and it is so difficult to find one to whom I can look for sympathy . . . I am rather worried just now—partly because I am leaving England, and partly because I have had some heavy losses on the Stock Exchange . . . I am starting on my voyage with a gloom which the knowledge that I am leaving some of the sweetest girls in the world in Ravensthorpe, but intensifies. If you get letters full of trouble, and gloomy views, you will only have yourself to blame for offering to befriend so wretched a creature as Yours affectionately Dick."

The conviction of his own wretchedness, however, was quickly dissipated by South African sunshine, and the glamour

of Ravensthorpe mysteriously dwindled as soon as he had visited the Caldecotts. The strange volatility of temperament which had developed with maturity, capable of snatching him from the wildest spirits into the depth of depression and back again without proportionate cause, now stood him in good stead, and he was able to throw himself with enthusiasm into planning a series of articles for the *Daily Mail*, and discussing with Ivy the possibility of an early marriage. The first half-dozen dispatches convinced Marlowe that he need hesitate no longer; he sent Edgar a cable appointing him *Daily Mail* correspondent and giving him the "freest of free hands."

In sending that one solitary story to the *Daily Mail*, the Cape Town typist had done better than she knew, for in changing from Reuters to Carmelite House Edgar transferred himself to an infinitely more congenial medium. The short, hard, accurate cables required of its correspondents by a news service had been too restricted, too impersonal for his taste; and though he was still, of course, required to keep the *Mail* punctually informed of military news by cable, he was given a far wider latitude in the long, leisurely "mail stories" which absorbed his chief energy and enthusiasm. Communications had not yet arrived at that withering point of efficiency where the written word becomes worthless at a few hours old; newspapers were glad to clothe the bare bones of daily war news with detailed and colourful accounts arriving in Fleet Street three weeks or a month late, and the quality of the work benefited by not having to be violently compressed into "cable-ese," or yelled into a transcontinental telephone several hours before the events it purported to describe had taken place. Edgar's longer dispatches, like those of other correspondents of big newspapers, were written, not at leisure, but at least with sufficient breathing space to allow for careful writing and considered form. For the first time he found himself with ample scope for the observation, humour and opinion which had had no place in

truncated daily cables. He "spread" himself generously for the editor who, after the first few articles, was more than prepared to give him elbow-room, and for the paper which in policy and opinion fitted him like a glove.

Neither his own temperament, his experience of life, nor his army training had led him to question the justice of British policy in the South African war. On the one side were the Empire, Rule Britannia, Tommy Atkins, the Flag—those vague but stirring abstractions which had inspired his verse; on the other the enemy, the Boers, cunning, treacherous and inferior. "Could there be the slightest doubt," he wrote, "in what direction my sentiments leant?" His sentiments being what they were, his conscience was clear, and with rare energy he brought his fine gifts of observation and description to bear on the congenial task of reporting the war from the popular and imperialist point of view.

Popular feeling in England with regard to the war had already passed through several distinctive phases. Jingo exuberance had marked the outbreak, speedily followed by dismay and anxiety when it became apparent that the Boers were by no means a body of rebels to be taught a sharp lesson, but a hard and skilful enemy who was costing Britain dear in lives and money. "Black Week," which had darkened the middle of December, 1899, when no news reached England which was not of serious losses or defeat, had done much to nip the frivolous growth of music-hall enthusiasm, but the successive reliefs of Ladysmith, Kimberley and Mafeking early in 1900, and Lord Roberts's victorious campaign in the middle of the summer, had restored confidence, if not the initial popularity of the war, and no words were bad enough for the Liberal minority who disapproved of the campaign—unless, perhaps, "disloyal" and "pro-Boer." Only one London newspaper, the *Daily Chronicle*, had had the courage to voice the Liberal view of the war as an unethical act of aggression and

annexation, and its capable and firm-principled editor, Mr. H. W. Massingham, had been ignominiously forced to resign by the proprietors, who had presumably noticed a dwindling in circulation. The foreign press, with scarcely an exception, were shrill in their denunciations of Britain's policy, and made no attempt to disguise their delight at the Boer successes. Undignified caricatures of Queen Victoria in French and German newspapers stung the Colonial Secretary to the point of public protest, but to little avail; the other European Powers, not being themselves at the moment engaged in colony-snatching, were universally of the opinion (pure wish-fulfilment as it turned out) that the power of the British Empire was finally cracking. These glad prophecies were very unreticently expressed by what Edgar, with seething patriotism, referred to in the columns of the *Daily Mail* as "Europe's reptile press," and which was certainly fed with anti-British propaganda by the skilful Boer agent in Europe, Dr. Leyds.

Now, in the closing weeks of 1900, public enthusiasm showed uneasy signs of flagging. The war had been going on for more than a year; England had poured into the field the biggest army she had ever been called on to provide; the long and bitter struggle had been crowned by victories which at the time had been thought decisive—and yet the war dragged on. Organised Boer resistance had disappeared, and in its place had come dangerous little handfuls of men who invaded Cape Colony and were difficult to catch, and did damage out of all proportion to their size. The Cape Colony Dutch, euphemistically described as "loyal" at the beginning of the war, were more and more openly showing where their sympathies lay, and giving endless trouble through spying, disaffection and rebellion. The public at home was sick of the war, and becoming vaguely dissatisfied. The fervid enthusiasm of '99 had dwindled to grumbling doggedness in the second year of struggle.

It was not enough, now, for the Queen to send encouraging half-pounds of chocolate bearing her image (as she had done in the New Year of 1900) to the men at the front; nor for actresses in West End theatres to recite Kipling's "Absent-Minded Beggar,"[1] with its refrain "Pass the hat for your credit's sake and Pay! Pay! Pay!", to feed the flow of public funds for the war. Inflammatory propaganda on both sides was actively and ingeniously conducted. The Boers, it was said, were dirty fighters; they did not "fight fair." They were credited with using the white flag to cover treacherous assaults; with sounding the British bugle calls of "Cease Fire" and "Retire" to mislead the Devonshire Regiment at Elandslaagte; with firing on Red Cross units, and using the hospital flag themselves to protect their guns; and, later, with "murdering" the British wounded as they lay on the field—a process with which modern warfare has made us all too familiar, but which in this last of the "gentlemen's wars" ranked as an unspeakable atrocity. The Boers on their side were equally outspoken and bitter about British atrocities. The burning of farms, looting, brutality and rape were described "with all the bald indecency of expression which kitchen-Dutch alone makes possible";[2] pianos had been wantonly broken up, and "old mothers" (improbably enough) "outraged" in God-fearing homesteads; and these so-called atrocities were reported not only in Transvaal and Free State newspapers, but in the pro-Boer Dutch townships of Cape Colony, where the burghers were expected to believe nothing

[1] This popular jingle was recited daily at the Palace Theatre by Lady Tree for the benefit of the *Daily Mail* War Fund, which by this means raised £70,000 in fourteen weeks. (Celebrating, of course, Tommy Atkins, who, though an "absent-minded beggar," "heard his country call," etc., the poem was quickly translated into several languages, notably Italian, in which, with enchanting literalness, it appeared as *Il Mendicante Distratto*—a fact for which I am indebted to Mr. C. E. Vulliamy's provocative book, *Outlanders*. What the Italians thought of an army of distracted mendicants is difficult to imagine.) The *Daily Telegraph's* Shilling Fund in the same period reached a total of 2,000,000 shillings, and the Mansion House Fund reached three-quarters of a million. Private subscriptions often ran into five figures, and one firm (chiefly interested, it must be confessed, in South African mines) gave £50,000.

[2] Edgar Wallace in the *Daily Mail*, January 1, 1901.

but good of "brave, good-hearted Tommy—the man who would gladly lay down his life to protect any woman in the world, whether she were Dutch or English or Japanese."[1] A certain amount of looting, inevitable in war, was undoubtedly winked at by the British officers,[2] and other trifling misdemeanours which, in the light of present-day habits of warfare, make one smile a little wryly; and the Boers—certainly no more impartial than the British—made the most of such incidents. British newspaper correspondents, on the other hand, often exhibited a ludicrous unfairness in their reporting of actual engagements, as in an account which described the Guards fighting "with a chivalry which cannot be too highly extolled," while the Boers were merely "guilty of miserable truculence."

Edgar's dispatches to the *Mail* were, considering the general temper of the time, fairly free from such extravagances, and undoubtedly they were very brilliant journalism. His famous account of the Vlakfontein "atrocities," which produced such repercussions in the War Office, and which will be considered later, was eventually confirmed as substantially true by Lord Kitchener, and on only one occasion was he guilty of the kind of sentimental barbarity which by the jingo section of the public was received with such favour. This was in an article headed "Woman—The Enemy,"[3] dealing with the spying and so-called treachery of the Boer women in officially annexed territory, and advocating out of hand shooting as a suitable punishment. "There have been many occasions since the war

[1] Edgar Wallace in the *Daily Mail*, January 1, 1901.

[2] "After the battle of Modder River 'Tommy' would a-looting go, and many were the odd prizes that he brought into camp. A fat turkey and a good capon dangling from the sporeen of an Argyll presented an appetising picture to the men of his company. But anon you would meet a Northumbrian carrying a birdcage and a Scot wheeling a perambulator 'lifted' in one of the Boer houses on the river bank. A Lancer was making heroic efforts to reconcile his charger to a squealing sucking-pig hanging from his holster. But what that young soldier meant to do with a child's bassinet, or that other with a toilet table, who shall say?" Alfred Kinnear, *To Modder River With Methuen*, 1900.

[3] *Daily Mail*, August 13, 1901.

started," he wrote, "when I have wished most earnestly that the friends of emancipated womanhood had had their way, and that the exact status of woman had been made equal to that of man. I have often wished her all the rights and privileges of her opposite fellow. The right to wear his clothes, and adopt his freedoms, to earn money, smoke cut cavendish, and wear a ring on her little finger. Also to share man's trials and hardships and responsibilities. To lead men into action, to be always eligible for the Victoria Cross, to be honoured for her gallantry—and shot for her treachery. Especially shot for her treachery." Edgar's attitude to the non-combatant Boers on the Transvaal farms, who, in spite of the official Union Jack flying at Pretoria, refused to regard themselves as British subjects while their own commandos were still elusively active and successful in the field, was in tune with the general Conservative feeling in England at the time; but it is impossible to-day not to recognise that in spying and passing on information to their own troops, albeit in nominally conquered territory, the Boer women acted with bravery and undoubted patriotism, and that the Government expedient of interning them in concentration camps was the best possible measure. "Woman—The Enemy" provoked caustic comment in the more liberal section of the English press. "That chivalrous and humane product of twenticth-century civilisation, Mr. Edgar Wallace," said the *Daily News*, "surpassed himself in the *Daily Mail* yesterday morning. In an article entitled 'Woman—The Enemy' he advocates without the smallest veil of reserve or humanity the shooting of Boer women. His reasons for urging this policy on the country are that he has made the discovery that in annexing a country against its will the women become part of the obstacles which you have to surmount. Mr. Wallace supports his villainous proposal by a medley of those unverified second-hand stories in which this gentleman revels. Perhaps if Mr. Edgar Wallace would manage to see a battle and describe

it at first hand—though we admit there are certain risks to be run in the process—he would be doing better work than by writing this ruffianly stuff from the safe retreat of Johannesburg." With melancholy pride Edgar copied out this criticism and pasted it beside the offending article in his album.

Though his articles could hardly be popular with the *Daily News*, they quickly attracted an enthusiastic public of their own, and were widely reproduced in colonial and provincial newspapers. To the business of telling the public what the war was like he brought a freshness of imagination and a descriptive skill hard to find in the work of the other correspondents. He approached the writing of each article as he might have done the construction of a short story—with a sharp eye for an arresting opening, an amusing or dramatic development, and a neat end. He knew that the public wanted to be cheered as well as instructed, and while he packed his stories with information, prophecy and opinion, he also wherever possible relieved the serious density of war news with typically Cockney sentiment and humour, at its best in reporting the doings and conversation of the ordinary soldier, and often extremely funny. There were few engagements in this last and longest period of the war which could be dignified with the name of major battles, and he travelled about South Africa as his fancy and his astute sense of news values dictated, pursuing De Wet in his erratic invasions of Cape Colony,[1] going out with a ganger's trolley on the Pretoria railway to search for bombs that "hide coyly behind sleepers and retire unobtrusively to the shelter of fish-plates," listening to treason preached from the pulpit of a Dutch church in Port Elizabeth and making a first-rate short story out of it, and over and over again, with the sympathy born of his own understanding and experience, reporting the opinions and activities of "Tommy Atkins," for whom, in this

[1] He was attached as *Daily Mail* correspondent to Lieut.-Col. Henniker's column in the "Great De Wet Hunt," January–March, 1901. His *Unofficial Despatches*, published in December, 1001, is dedicated to Col. Henniker.

long and weary period of the war, it was so necessary to fan the embers of popular enthusiasm. *Daily Mail* readers, wading at breakfast through closely packed columns of war news and House of Commons debate, would begin on an Edgar Wallace dispatch from Springfontein, ostensibly about Lord Kitchener, and, instead of strategical analysis, would find themselves listening to Tommy's own version of that harassed general.

" . . . the train is drawn up by Springfontein platform, and dinner having been served at 5.30 instead of 7.30 owing to the refreshment-room keeper having an engagement at the latter hour, I have nothing to do but to sit and listen to Atkins discussing questions of the day—for Atkins is gathered outside the shuttered windows of my saloon, and he holds views.

"The agenda of the platform debating society was prolific in subjects, and contained among others: Should soldiers receive 5s. a day in war time? Shall we ever catch De Wet? Are the Yeomanry good soldiers? Does a single eyeglass assist the eyesight?[1] Will the Militia ever go home? When will the war end? And is Kitchener a great general?—some of the subjects dovetailed into others, thus:

"Voice from Without: 'E's the man to finish the war. No 'arf larks about 'im. Can't stand no eyeglasses, 'e can't, no 'umbug an' no old buck. Buller goes up to 'im an' says, 'I'm general 'ere,' 'e says . . . 'and I'll thank you to get orf the battlefield whilst I'm a-conductin' of my operations.' 'Oh!' says Kitchener, 'p'raps you don't know that I'm a Lord, while you're only a blooming Sir,' 'e says——

"Superior Voice: That don't make no difference.

"First Voice: Wot don't?

"Superior Voice (scathingly): Sirs and lords ain't no rank, fat 'ed, else you'd 'ave the Dook o' Westminster Commander-in-Chief.

[1] The drawling, monocled English officer was a stock figure of fun during the war, sometimes with justification.

"Third Voice (huskily): My opinion you're torking out of the back of your 'cd, Smithy.

"Smithy (bitterly): P'raps you're tellin' this yarn, and p'raps I ain't: any'ow, whether it makes no difference about bein' a lord or sir or not, that's wot Kitchener told Buller—'t any rate, Kitchener's the bloke to end this war . . .

"After a pause . . . somebody asks why Kitchener objects to the monocle—only the querist did not say monocle, but relied on conveying the sense of his question by referring to it as a pane of glass.

"Smithy: Cos 'e's a soldier an' likes to see everything reg'lar an' well balanced. If 'e 'ad 'is way sergeants would 'ave stripes on each arm an' soldiers 'ave medals on both breasts. Wot's a single eyeglass but unreg'lar . . . If they'd wear spectacles it'd be all right; but the young officers won't wear spectacles for fear of being mistaken for colonels and drafted to the Army Pay Corps . . .

"By easy stages the debate became theological, with many and weird premises, with divers curious and unprintable deductions.

"Dear old Atkins!

"Here were a dozen men who had probably seen more battles in one year than most generals see in a lifetime, and yet their talk was not of war, or great daring, but just the subjects, the selfsame subjects, they would argue out in times of peace at the bar of the 'Green Man.'

"It seemed more than incongruous at times to hear—here in the loneliness of the rolling veld, with the black peaks of the distant hills, sooty bulks against the velvet-black skyline, with death lurking in the darkness about, and over all the solemn hush of even—it seems strange, not to say unnatural, when Tommies, who, in keeping with the scene, should by rights be speaking in awed whispers of golden deeds and glorious sacrifices, are arguing in strident Cockney on the legitimacy of the birth of Moses.

"'Found 'im in the bulrushes—yuss, that's wot *she* said.'"

This kind of thing was not offered in the place of "hard" war news, but in addition to it, and to the average person made far more attractive reading than the essential daily cables concerning the evacuation of troops from a laager or the rumoured movements and intentions of Hertzog or Botha. Quick to support the growing popularity of its new correspondent, the *Daily Mail*, within a few months of his appointment, was observing in booming tones in its leading articles that "the article . . . by Mr. Edgar Wallace, which we publish to-day, affords no little material for discussion," or "the letter we print to-day from our war correspondent, Mr. Edgar Wallace, deserves the careful attention of every patriotic Englishman." By the summer of 1901 he was firmly established.[1]

Meanwhile, in the first week of April, he had paid a brief and determined visit to Cape Town and married Ivy. It was not an altogether cheerful wedding. Mr. Caldecott, disapproving to the last, had taken himself off to London and the British Museum, and neither he nor Arthur Caldecott sent greetings. "We must remember," wrote one of Ivy's sisters many years later, "this was over thirty years ago, and a code of ideas about the duties of children existed which is hardly understood to-day. Father was very masterful and always had a tradition of military discipline." Nevertheless, in spite of the military tradition maintained by Mr. Caldecott in his Bloomsbury boarding-house, they made the best of it, and supported by Mrs. Caldecott (who fully realised at last that after thirty years of married life she was never likely to see her husband again),

[1] A selection of his *Daily Mail* war articles was published by Hutchinson & Co. in December, 1901, under the title *Unofficial Despatches*. The book was moderately successful, since it sold approximately 2,000 copies, but, although it included some of the best articles, it is curious to see how much of their peculiar pungency is lost by taking them out of their topical setting in the columns of a newspaper.

went off on their few days' honeymoon to Gordon's Bay with the blessing of Edgar's "dearest Madam" and Ivy's younger sisters. They had only a few days to themselves, since Edgar was eager to get back to work, and the war and the *Daily Mail* waited for no man; after a week's honeymoon Ivy was established alone in a small furnished bungalow in a suburb of Cape Town, and Edgar was embroiled in an enthralling tussle with the military censors.

Press censorship in war-time is always a difficult and contentious matter, and now, with Lord Roberts gone home and Kitchener in command, the muzzling of newspaper correspondents was stricter than ever. Kitchener hated the Press. With all the soldier's contempt for the civilian, and the touchy man's resentment of unasked criticism, he had from the beginning regarded the correspondents as a dangerous nuisance, and early in 1901 insisted on a vigorous and narrow system of censorship. Up to a point, his exasperation can be well understood. Early in the war details of Lord Methuen's "secret" advance towards Kimberley had appeared in the Johannesburg newspapers at a time when he had barely quitted his base at Orange River; Buller's preparations before the disaster at Spion Kop had been freely reported, and another general had peevishly complained that it was impossible for him to move so much as a gun without the news being flashed through to London by war correspondents, and from there relayed by telegraph straight to the enemy. Edgar himself, while at Orange River for Reuters, had already annoyed the Censor by sending through code messages giving details of British losses, and the cumulative effect of such leakages (highly undesirable from the military point of view) had been to confirm Kitchener in his opinion of the war correspondents as a mischievous body of hangers-on who at any moment were liable to throw a spanner into the works. He had increased the tension

of the situation by letting his personal antipathy become obvious, and even H. A. Gwynne, with whom he was on reasonably friendly terms, had not been able to persuade him to meet the Press half-way. Much, indeed, might have been done by taking them at least superficially into his confidence, and making clear the necessity for co-operation; but Kitchener's sense of his own importance would never allow this, and outwitting the Censor consequently developed a sporting appeal for the more enterprising of the correspondents.

One of the conditions of a war correspondent's pass was the signing by the holder of an undertaking to send through no messages that had not been approved by the military censor, and in practice this restriction, though undoubtedly a necessary one, often meant that dispatches were mutilated without good reason, and news which could not possibly have had an adverse effect on the campaign was strangled in an elaborate cat's cradle of red tape. Any messages or letters sent to newspapers by ordinary mail were, naturally, exempt from this official scrutiny, but by the time they arrived in Fleet Street—three weeks or a month after they had been written—they were usually too stale and out of date to be censorable. Exasperation, even among the most cautious and easily controlled of the correspondents, had by the summer of 1901 become acute, and Edgar, whose anxiety to do himself credit in the *Daily Mail* outstripped any yearning to oblige Lord Kitchener, fretted continually.

A crisis finally occurred in June, following the publication of certain sensational statements in the *Daily Mail*, and resulting in unpleasant accusations being levelled against that newspaper by the Government; in the parliamentary squabbling which followed the editor narrowly escaped being called to the Bar of the House. For this Edgar was personally responsible. He had been at Pietersburg, in the northern Transvaal, hunting

for news, when he had heard rumours of a sharp engagement at Vlakfontein, more than two hundred miles to the south-west and almost due west of Johannesburg. He immediately boarded a south-bound goods train, and arrived in Park Station, Johannesburg, the same evening. Here he learned from the chief clerk (who had been useful on previous occasions as a source of information) that there had, indeed, been a battle, that the result was uncertain, and that British casualties were reported to be heavy. They were, in fact, expecting hospital trains within a few hours from Krugersdorp. Without loss of time Edgar took the first train out to Krugersdorp, twenty miles from the scene of action, where he found a number of wounded men waiting to entrain, and from their evidence pieced together his story of the battle. Their most sensational news was of "wholesale" shooting of wounded men by the Boers, and Edgar, not waiting to confirm this atrocity through the usual constipated channels of military intelligence, cabled the story. It was, as he anticipated, "censored out of existence," and though he could not be sure of this at the time, he took the precaution of writing a corroborative account and sending it as a letter. This letter appeared in the *Daily Mail* a month later, and had the effect on the Government of a Chinese cracker. "Abandoning," they read, "the old methods of dropping the butt end of a rifle on the wounded soldier's face, when there was none to see the villainy, the Boer has done his bloody work in the light of day, within sight of a dozen eye-witnesses, and the stories we have hardly dared to hint, lest you thought we had grown hysterical, we can now tell without fear of ridicule. The Boers murder wounded men. Yes, the gentle, bucolic Boer, who was forced to take up the rifle, purchased for him a dozen years before by a paternal Government, to guard the independence of his country, may be placed in the same category as the Matabele, the Mashona, the Dervish, the Afridi, and with every other savage race with which Britain

has waged war. And the soldier who is stricken down on the field is no more certain that his life will be spared by brother Boer than he was that brother Fuzzy would pass him by." The effect of this somewhat over-written description was electrical. The ideal of gentlemanly behaviour in war-time was still respected, and the assertion, in plain black and white, that the enemy was "murdering" our wounded caused an explosion of scandal. The War Secretary cabled to Lord Kitchener, who replied soothingly that there was "no foundation whatever for the report." Four days later he modified this assurance by adding that a certain Lieutenant Hern had stated that he had seen a Boer shooting wounded men at Vlakfontein, but at the War Office this message was prudently smothered. Lord Stanley (the present Lord Derby), then Under-Secretary of State for War, threatened in the House of Commons that if the *Mail* correspondent's report were incorrect, he would be severely punished. An undignified wrangle set up between the War Office, the House of Commons and the *Daily Mail*. The War Office threatened to cut off all official news from the offending newspaper, and the *Daily Mail* retaliated by tartly accusing the War Office of suppression of essential facts and deliberate lying. Not to be outdone, the War Office then accused the *Mail* of obtaining secret information by bribing War Office clerks—a charge which the *Mail* delightedly took up, challenging the War Secretary to repeat his statements "on a public platform," where it could proceed against him for libel. Here the House of Commons joined in with an excitable debate, and came to the conclusion that the *Mail's* challenge to the War Secretary was a breach of privilege. A motion urging that the editor should be summoned to the Bar of the House was, however, defeated, and the indignation on both sides gradually subsided. Lord Kitchener relieved his feelings by having Edgar, the cause of all the trouble, sent down from Johannesburg to Cape Town

with an embarrassed military escort.[1] After a couple of days in Cape Town with Ivy, Edgar unobtrusively went back to Johannesburg to have the last word. If Kitchener's position gave him the power to snub, Edgar also was in an excellent position to annoy Kitchener. He spent some time over the composition of a thousand-word article on "The Corruption of the Censorship." "The Censorship has had its innings," he wrote, "it has served its purpose. It can go . . . There is much that Lord Kitchener does not think important enough to cable to Downing Street that I think is sufficiently interesting to send to Carmelite House. It is not fair that because Lord Kitchener is a poor correspondent his unofficial rivals are to be prevented from competing with him." He ended with a dark hint, portentously headed OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT MAKES A PROPHECY. "As for me," he assured his readers, "I do not wish to compete with the Headquarters Staff. Casualty lists are hardly in my line, but I think the time is close at hand when I shall want to wire something that Lord Kitchener will not want to send or the Government to receive."

This contretemps, if it did nothing to ease the censorship restrictions or sweeten Kitchener's opinion of the Press in general, at least had the effect of bringing Edgar into the limelight. Other newspapers reproduced passages from his articles, referring to him flatteringly as the *Daily Mail's* "famous" or "distinguished" war correspondent, and the illustrated weeklies produced fanciful drawings of the Boers squinting with devilish

[1] It is perhaps impossible to arrive at the exact truth with regard to the shooting of British wounded at Vlakfontein. Edgar, like other correspondents whose cables were censored, had the story at second-hand from men wounded in the battle, and his statements received some support in private letters from soldiers. On the other hand, it is possible that any atrocities were greatly exaggerated. The *Times History of the War*, published in 1907, long after an enquiry had been held and the hysteria of prejudice died down, contains the following note: "Rumours obtained currency as to the wholesale shooting of wounded men on the ridge by Boers after the capture of the guns. The evidence, when sifted, proves that a man named Van Zyl, who was wounded himself, crawled about and shot at least three wounded men before he could be stopped. Otherwise the behaviour of the Boers was good."



Editor of the *Rand Daily Mail*, Johannesburg.

malignity as they plunged their bayonets into bandaged men. T. P. O'Connor, then editing *M.A.P.* (*Mainly About People*), one of the first of the weeklies to flourish on personalities and gossip, thought him worth a short article, and advertised (together with "The Society Butterfly and Lord Rosebery") "A Pen Picture of Edgar Wallace." "Mr. Edgar Wallace," wrote T. P., "the *Daily Mail's* daring war correspondent, is another illustration of the rapid making of reputations that has gone on since the beginning of the war in South Africa . . . Since the publication of his Vlakfontein allegations, and his slashing set-to with the military censors, Mr. Wallace has formed a wider circle of readers, and for the present he remains one of the most talked-of personalities in South Africa. The tone of Mr. Wallace's vivid complaint against the military censorship is largely characteristic of the man. Absolute fearlessness is the keynote of his character, with a tendency to free, alert, hard hitting . . . He is an excellent type of the pushful Anglo-Saxon." Within a few months we find Edgar being pleasantly lionised at several charity garden parties in Cape Colony, and the *East London Daily Dispatch* offering him as the star attraction at an entertainment in aid of the Refugee Children's Christmas Fund. "The public is reminded," says this singularly appealing announcement, "of the lecture on Rudyard Kipling by Mr. Edgar Wallace in the Wesley Hall to-night . . . A number of characteristic recitations will be given by the lecturer, and by Messrs. L. L. Ussher and B. J. Snow. Songs will be sung by Miss Macdonald, and Messrs. D. J. Griffith and W. T. Saunderson, and a display of club-swinging will be given by Mr. Louis Papenfuss . . ."

Meanwhile the war moved slowly and painfully towards its end. In the past two years its character had completely changed and Kitchener was faced with a problem for which there was no military precedent. Officially, at least, the two republics were conquered; the two peoples most emphatically were not.

The guerrilla generals, Botha, De la Rey and De Wet, carried on a successful and unconventional campaign in the Free State, the Transvaal and Cape Colony, secretly assisted by most of the farming population of the annexed territories, who supplied them with food, sniped at the British, and turned every farm into a potential garrison. There were only about 20,000 Boers in the field by this time, while the effective fighting strength of the British forces had been swelled to 164,000; but under the pricks and harrying of guerrilla warfare the unwieldy British army, "like Gulliver in the toils of the Lilliputians," found itself maddeningly powerless. To solve this new problem Kitchener had invented a system which, as it slowly improved in practice, gradually but surely wore down the Boer resistance. It was a method more nearly resembling the methodical extermination of dangerous animals than the conventional usages of warfare, but it was the only tactics to defeat the quicksilver elusiveness of the Boers, and the subterranean activities of the civilians who supported them. Chains of "blockhouses" (miniature stone or corrugated-iron forts holding six to a dozen men) were first erected at short intervals along the railways, which up to the present had been particularly vulnerable, and these chains were gradually extended to form an armoured network over the whole country. The Boer commandos were then driven against these barriers like game, and though many of them succeeded in breaking through, the net was methodically strengthened and tightened about them, and their forces reduced by the wholesale taking of prisoners. Meanwhile the country on which they lived was systematically devastated. The farms on which they had depended for food were evacuated and burned, and the inhabitants transferred to concentration camps. Cattle and sheep were seized, standing crops destroyed, and even the grass on which the commandos depended for fodder burned over vast areas. Nevertheless it was no easy matter to starve the enemy into submission. The

suffering and high mortality of the Boer women and children in the concentration camps[1] was an unintentional though cruelly effective weapon, but at the same time their imprisonment relieved the fighting burghers of responsibility for thousands of impoverished families, and gave them a compensating freedom and mobility. Deprived of their usual resources of food, they shot their own meat, lived on mealies and water, and dug their own salt-pans. As the clothing wore from their backs they patched together jackets of rough sheepskin, and used the uniforms of dead soldiers and British prisoners. Abandoning their guns, which were of little use in guerrilla warfare, they drew on vast buried stores of rifle ammunition, and frequently replenished their supplies by the capture of British convoys. In this way they were able to continue in the field much longer than Kitchener in his most pessimistic moments had anticipated; but the relentless starving and devastation of the country acted against them through the civilian population, which, worn down by privation and increasingly impatient for the end of the war, began to surrender voluntarily in large numbers, and even to act as spies and scouts under the British. The Boer generals were thus faced with the possibility of eventually leading only a minority among their own countrymen, and being reduced finally to the status of bandits, whom the people for whose independence they were fighting would sooner or later be happy to see vanquished.

There had already been tentative negotiations for peace between Botha and Kitchener at Middelburg in February, 1901, but this conference had ended in a deadlock through Botha's refusal to consider any terms which did not guarantee Boer

[1] By October, 1901, the number of prisoners, mainly women and children, in the concentration camps, had risen to 118,000. Conditions in many of these camps were appalling, and at one point the death-rate rose to 344 per thousand. In the Middelburg camp 341 children died in the month of July alone. Following strong representations to the Government, a Commission of Ladies was finally appointed in July, 1901, to report on the conditions of the camps, and introduced a number of vitally necessary reforms; but 16,000 children and 4,000 women had died in the camps before the end of the war.

independence and an unqualified amnesty for the Dutch rebels, and the war had consequently dragged painfully on for another thirteen months. By April, 1902, however, the general desire of the Boers was so strongly for peace that it became obvious to their leaders that negotiations would have to be entered into with the British, and accordingly the Free State President, Marthinus Steyn, and Acting-President Burger, who had taken Kruger's place in the Transvaal since the flight of the aged President to Europe, met Kitchener in the latter's house in Pretoria for a preliminary discussion. Immediately the Press, which had been prophesying and forecasting peace for so many months, turned an eager searchlight of publicity on the meeting, and Kitchener, his instinctive antagonism fortified by a very real fear of queering the pitch by premature or irresponsible announcements, saw to it that every possible channel of information was effectually stopped. There was, indeed, some reason on his side in taking this precaution, for the negotiations were slow and difficult to an extraordinary degree, and it took the Boers and the Government six weeks to arrive at an agreement. Press comment, criticism or interference might well have done serious damage in the early stages, and towards the end, after having kept the Press and the public in the dark for so long, Kitchener was determined that the signing of the Peace Treaty should be conveyed to the public in an official announcement, which should not, if he could help it, be forestalled by the newspapers.

As soon as his first cable announcing the meeting in Pretoria had been blandly handed back to him by the Censor, Edgar realised that if any news of the progress of negotiations were to reach the *Daily Mail*, it must be managed by strategy. Nothing but obstructive secrecy could be expected of Kitchener. Accordingly, with the co-operation of the *Daily Mail*, he made elaborate code arrangements. A few days before, in Heath's Hotel in Johannesburg, he had met a rich Jewish financier,

Harry Freeman Cohen, and the two men had been mutually attracted. Now Mr. Cohen was able to act as the vital link between the peace conference and Carmelite House, and it was arranged that Edgar should send a series of cables to his brother, Cæsar Cohen, who had an office in London, and who would pass on the messages to Carmelite House to be decoded. The first message, that Edgar had "bought 1,000 Rand Collieries" at a particular figure, was innocuous enough, but, as they had expected, was challenged as code by the Military Censor. Edgar, however, was armed with a broker's note, confirming that he had bought the call on these particular shares, and the Censor, satisfied that they reported the progress of a bona fide Stock Exchange transaction, allowed subsequent cables to pass unquestioned. Edgar meanwhile, with the rest of the correspondents, sat down in Pretoria to await developments.

At first, so unacceptable to the British Government were the demands of the Boers, it seemed possible that the negotiations would be as abortive as the Middelburg Conference. The independence of the Boer republics, an amnesty for the rebels, and the financial compensation for damage done during the war, were the rocks on which the discussion threatened to founder. The Boer generals for the most part felt able to continue their guerrilla warfare almost indefinitely, and were unwilling to lay down their arms unless the national independence for which they had fought for nearly three years could be assured them. They also wished to be certain that reprisals would not be taken against the Dutch rebels who had supported them; and, since they had throughout the whole period of the war been signing promissory notes to the farmers for damage and supplies, they hoped, for their honour's sake, that these notes would be covered by a substantial British indemnity. Sir Alfred Milner, however, as mouthpiece of the Government, refused even to discuss the question of

independence; after three years of warfare on this very issue he regarded the Boers' proposal as impudent and fantastic. Neither, though any measures taken against the rebels were certain to be lenient, could he allow the defeated Boers to dictate terms for the treatment of people who, officially at least, were British subjects. On the question of indemnity he regarded the Boers as equally brazen and unreasonable in expecting the Government to pay for the enemy's war; but under pressure from Kitchener, who was anxious for peace even at the cost of considerable concessions, an indemnity of £3,000,000 was finally agreed on.

The question of independence, on which the Government was implacable and the Boers almost equally determined not to give way, was the most serious stumbling-block, and for a month there was a lull in the negotiations while the Boer leaders prepared to put this vital issue to the people. Although the countries were still nominally at war, a practical armistice was granted while the Boers elected delegates, thirty from each republic, for a private peace conference at Vereeniging. As most of the Boer generals still in the field were elected, active hostilities were brought very nearly to a standstill, though Ian Hamilton in the western Transvaal and Bruce Hamilton in the east were still conducting business-like operations. The sixty delegates and the representatives of the two republican governments met in the "peace camp" at Vereeniging on the 15th of May. The delegates were accommodated in tents, and a large marquee was erected for the convention. The whole camp was closely fenced about with barbed wire and guarded by sentries, for on the Boers' decision on the question of independence the whole fate of the Peace Treaty depended, and Kitchener was determined that nothing should leak out until the signing or rejection of the treaty was a *fait accompli*. The war correspondents were on the wrong side of the barbed wire, and fretted and argued and lodged complaints to no purpose. For

fifteen days the discussion went on inside the big marquee, punctuated by occasional conferences in Pretoria with Milner and Kitchener, when the Boers would lay new proposals of compromise before the Government, each time to have them politely but inexorably rejected. Without renunciation of independence, said Milner, there was no agreement possible with the Government; and rather than renounce the freedom for which they had fought for two and a half years the strongly nationalist section of the delegates favoured an immediate resumption of hostilities.

During this apparent deadlock, with suspense and anxiety running high in England and South Africa, the *Daily Mail* annoyed its rivals and astonished the Government by coming out with definite statements on the progress of negotiations, and coolly prophesying that the signing of the Peace Treaty could be confidently expected within a few days. How news could have leaked through to Carmelite House from the closely guarded peace camp at Vereeniging, nobody, not even the war correspondents nosing disconsolately along the barbed wire, could possibly imagine. Edgar himself, whom (with sufficient reason) they suspected, had not been seen even on the outskirts of the camp; he appeared to spend most of his time travelling about the locality by train, with an innocently preoccupied expression. A broad hint was conveyed to him from Kitchener that if he were ever proved to be the channel through which news was leaking there would be serious trouble. Several of the other correspondents, burdened with the uncomfortable suspicion that they were missing something, formed themselves into a professional deputation and made him a strong protest. But Edgar, as he was able to point out with perfect truth, had not been near the camp. He had been quietly engaged in minding his own business, and attending to one or two little financial transactions.

On the evening of May 31st, after a final debate lasting for

two days, the Boers decided to agree to the peace proposals put forward by Great Britain. This last session had been held in the greatest secrecy, and when, shortly before midnight, they left Vereeniging to carry their final answer to Kitchener at Pretoria, no one had any clue as to what that answer could be. No one, that is, except the editor, foreign editor, sub-editors, compositors, printers and general staff of the *Daily Mail*, who had already had the satisfaction of seeing to press the decoded version of Edgar's latest plunge on the Stock Exchange, and knew that at that very moment the Peace Treaty was being signed at Pretoria.[1] Early next morning the *Daily Mail* contents bills, prepared beforehand in variations to meet every contingency, spread the welcome news of peace into every corner of England, and the paper itself carried a brief but authoritative cable announcing the signing of the treaty.

The other newspapers, their editorials still inflated with windy prophecy, were indignant and incredulous. No Government confirmation of the signing of the Peace Treaty had yet been received, and they did not hesitate to taunt the *Mail* with having found a mare's nest. "All the pretended revelations which have been given to the world are the veriest guesswork of speculation," said the *Daily Telegraph* severely. Other newspapers were less polite. The following day Mr. Balfour announced the signing of the Peace Treaty in the House of Commons, and it became obvious to everyone that the *Mail* had been up to its old game of extracting information from simple-minded and under-paid clerks in the War Office.

But the real story was neither so dull nor so simple as that, and had a great deal to do with Edgar's daily trips on the Vaal River railway, and with the Stock Exchange cables which passed daily between Johannesburg and Mr. Cæsar Cohen's office in London. The Vaal River train at one

[1] The printers, compositors and entire editorial staff of the *Daily Mail* were locked into Carmelite House throughout the night, to prevent the "scoop" leaking to other newspapers.

point ran within sight of the peace camp, and in the camp—among the sentries, as luck would have it, who guarded the marquee—Edgar had an old and trusted crony. This convenient accomplice had been equipped with three coloured handkerchiefs, one red, one white, and one blue; and the significance attached to their colours was—red, "nothing doing"; blue, "making progress"; white, "treaty definitely to be signed." Daily, and towards the end, several times a day, Edgar, smoking a pipe and innocently reading a newspaper, would make the trip from Pretoria to Vaal River; and as often as he was off duty his friend the sentry would saunter along the barbed-wire fence nearest the railway, thoughtfully wiping his nose on a coloured handkerchief as he went along. If the handkerchief were blue, the *Daily Mail* next day was "able to reveal" that the Vereeniging convention was moving satisfactorily towards peace; if red, that a hitch had occurred. As early as May 16th it had informed its readers (on the strength of the white handkerchief) that "peace was absolutely assured." And now, at the end of the conference, it had published the news a full twenty-four hours before it had been given out officially.

To defend itself against charges of bribery and corruption the *Mail* within a few days published the story of how the "beat" had been obtained, and Edgar at one blow became a hero and a felon. His felony, needless to say, was most apparent to Lord Kitchener and the Censor, and to a few of the war correspondents who thought that they could have managed something equally ingenious if only they had been (which of course they were not) equally disreputable. Edgar himself, well satisfied with his achievement, hurried down from Johannesburg to Cape Town. These last two weeks had been almost unbearably full of suspense, for while he had been stalking the Peace Treaty, Ivy, in Mowbray, had been awaiting her first confinement, and had given birth to a daughter on the 23rd

while Edgar was making one of his daily excursions on the railway. It had been intolerable to be torn between two such anxieties, and only the knowledge that Ivy had had Mrs. Caldecott, capable and reassuring, constantly beside her, had enabled him to concentrate on the important business of eluding the Censor. Now he had the delight of finding her well on the way to recovery, with a child who seemed to them both a miracle of beauty and perfection. Together they concocted a white and silver announcement to the effect that "Miss Eleanore Clare Hellier Wallace" had been born on May 23rd, and was "doing very well thank you." To add to their pleasure, Edgar had also a piece of magnificent news for Ivy, and they spent hours discussing the sudden blossoming of his prospects. Harry Freeman Cohen, who had been impressed with Edgar's capabilities from the first meeting, and had willingly helped him in his Peace Treaty strategy, had taken a fancy to be a newspaper proprietor, and accordingly had bought the moribund Johannesburg *Standard and Diggers' News*, from the ashes of which he proposed to raise a phœnix among newspapers under the title of the *Rand Daily Mail*. He had discussed his plans with Edgar, and had offered him the job of editor at £2,000 a year. This giddy figure (he had been getting about £28 a month with the *Daily Mail*), coupled with the alluring prospect of being an independent editor, had immediately decided Edgar, and his head was already buzzing with schemes for making the new venture the most successful newspaper on the Rand. It was, as he and Ivy constantly told each other, a wonderfully important position for a young man of twenty-seven, and who could tell, indeed, where it might end? They must move to Johannesburg, of course, as soon as Ivy was strong enough, and there begin a life of successful magnificence which would bring down Mr. Caldecott's grey hairs in regret and mortification to the grave. There remained now only a visit to London, to take his leave of the *Daily Mail* and attend

the ceremonial dinner with which they proposed to honour him. Leaving Ivy in the care of her mother, who had also undertaken to supervise the house removal, in a triumphantly happy frame of mind he sailed for England.

Meanwhile Lord Kitchener, who had been chewing the cud of retribution ever since the signing of the Peace Treaty, dealt what he hoped would be a body blow to Edgar's career. Edgar received the following letter from the Censor:

"Censor's Office, Johannesburg,
"July 1, 1902.

"Dear Sir,

I have been instructed to write and inform you that in consequence of your having evaded the rules of censorship subsequent to the warning you received, you will not in future be allowed to act as war correspondent: and further, that you will not be recommended for the medal."

But Edgar's fortunes were set fair, and he could afford to snap his fingers at the Censor and his decorations. He read the letter with amusement, and as soon as he arrived in London gave the story to the Press, with the aloof comment that "one scarcely knows whether to be amused or saddened by the puerility of the War Office." Secretly, though, he chalked up a black mark against Kitchener, and promised himself that one day he would expose that "man of ice and blood" in a devastating article. But it was difficult to bear malice, even against Kitchener, when everything else was going so gloriously well: when he found himself the man of the hour in Fleet Street, and Alfred Harmsworth had shaken him by the hand and parted from him with obvious regret: when the *Mail* had given him a banquet at the Savoy Hotel on Coronation night, and had presented him with a small silver casket of obscure purpose but excellent quality "in recognition of his

services during the South African War": when flattering speeches had been made, and the toastmaster had had to hammer for silence when he had risen to reply in a few well-chosen words from the chairman's table. Nothing now, he thought, could stand in the way of either happiness or success. And he was going back to South Africa to enjoy them.

CHAPTER II

The House That Harmsworth Built

THE office of the Johannesburg *Standard and Diggers' News* was in the top floors of a ramshackle and depressing brick warren behind the corner of Rissik and Commissioner Streets. Originally built as a block of commercial travellers' sample rooms, it was hidden from the street by a row of shops, and separated from their back wall by a narrow alley where garbage was thrown and the native boys from a near-by restaurant cut the throats of their chickens. The upper floors were reached by broad wooden ladders; draughts, noise and smells pierced the comfortless building from top to bottom. A goods hoist clattered gustily from floor to floor in that part of the office set aside for the sub-editors, and the screech of chickens, held to bleed over the garbage bins in the alley, punctually heralded the approach of lunch and dinner.

It was here, on an obsolete printing press (commandeered by Kruger for propaganda purposes during the war) that the *Rand Daily Mail* in the autumn of 1902 was brought into being, and here, in a closet-like room partitioned off in a corner, that Edgar found himself for the first time invested with the dignity and responsibilities of an editor. The room was too small to admit more furniture than a battered desk, a chair, and an old-fashioned book-case; the only telephone hung on the outside of the partition, and was answered by whoever happened to be near it. As a newspaper office it was not impressive, but Edgar ascended its creaking ladders with as much pride as if they had been the stairways of Carmelite House. He was a man of substance now, with a solid position in Johannesburg and

£2,000 a year to rely on; he was free to express his opinions in leading articles, and, within limits, to direct the policy of the paper; there was a small staff under him in Johannesburg and a more formidable corps of foreign correspondents than the paper would ever need (or, indeed, could afford) appointed on his own responsibility. He was moreover the proud tenant of a large over-furnished bungalow for which he was paying the exorbitant rent of £50 a month, and was crowding still further with expensive pieces from the Paris exhibition; he had engaged a staff of native servants, and was encouraging timid Ivy to regard herself as a hostess. Such visiting celebrities as found themselves in Johannesburg were waylaid at Heath's Hotel and brought home to brandy and cigars; the entire cast of Leonard Rayne's touring company, sixteen strong, was brought to the bungalow, and, to Ivy's frenzy, invited to luncheon. There were convivial evenings with his office colleagues in hotels and restaurants, where, as editor and patron, it was a proud and gratifying privilege to pay the bill. There were race meetings at Turffontein on Saturdays, and at the Auckland Park Trotting Club, of which he was a director, where money could be thrown about in the handsomest manner; there were feverish excitements over the Stock Exchange, which on the giddy see-saw of mining shares was making and breaking fortunes every day of the week.

This new prosperity was quickly reflected in Edgar's person. His figure began to fill out, and his moustache grew bolder. He indulged his taste for large, pale-coloured hats with rolling brims, and strolled to the office in high-buttoned suits of a sporting and opulent character. The gold-headed cane, the solid watch-chain festooned across his waistcoat, the ring on his little finger, the immaculate yellow gloves carried importantly in the left hand, bespoke him a man of consequence in Johannesburg, and if fulfilling that pleasant position were costing a little more than the £2,000 a year which Freeman Cohen was paying

him, what did it matter? Money was easy to come by, and the Johannesburg tradesmen were only too glad to give credit to so promising a customer. Besides, when money ran short, it could always be borrowed—a whispered tip on the gold market, a lucky day at the races, and all could be retrieved. The money would be paid back, there would be chicken and champagne at the bungalow, and a box at the theatre.

The respect he commanded in the theatre was one of the most stimulating things about his new position. Managers were ingratiating, and a good box was always at his disposal. This, though the standards of the touring companies were perhaps not of the highest, and the audiences at the Johannesburg Gaiety not remarkable for either taste or manners, was exceedingly pleasant, and he developed the habit of dropping into the theatre at all hours, and writing the dramatic critic's column himself when the play took his fancy. It was years since he had been in so intimate a relation with the theatre—years separating him from the boy who had watched from behind the scenes with Mr. Anstee—and the old excitement fiercely repossessed him. Surely he must one day write a successful play, and, like so many others, make a fortune! He tried his hand at odd scenes and sketches, and was disappointed. There must be some trick, he concluded, which all successful playwrights knew, and which he must learn. Obsessed with this belief, he haunted the Gaiety Theatre, cross-questioning actors, managers and producers on the details of their trade, wandering about the house to satisfy himself as to which jokes made the gallery laugh, and which the stalls, analysing plays with Leonard Rayne and any other members of the company whom he could buttonhole, trying to talk Frank Celli into founding a comic opera company for the Standard Theatre, and formulating theories as to why one kind of play was a success and another a failure. He searched his imagination for an infallible subject for a popular drama, and decided that an empire-building play

with Cecil Rhodes as hero could not fail to be a record-breaker. In his spare time at the office, between leading articles and dramatic criticism, in the intervals of gold share news and the anxiety of his expensive army of foreign correspondents, he began to plan the melodrama which was to make his fortune.

Editing a new paper, however, though an exciting occupation, was not one to which he was entirely suited. The boldness of his ideas stimulated circulation, but the expensiveness of them worried Freeman Cohen. With the resources of Cohen's fortune behind him he secured sensational material at exorbitant prices. A good story, in his opinion, was worth almost anything the proprietor could afford, and he was only narrowly talked out of paying £1,000 for a highly suspicious account of an attempt to assassinate Lord Milner. Remonstrances from Cohen resulted in arguments and quarrels, and on more than one occasion he flung out of the office in a temper, vowing never to return. Johannesburg, indeed, by the end of the first six months had lost a good deal of its illusive glitter, and in moments of candour he confessed himself disillusioned and discouraged. A private grief had crushed the gaiety of his household, for in March the baby, Clare, had died suddenly and dreadfully of meningitis, and Ivy, distracted with misery, was almost ill with the violence of her desire to escape from Johannesburg. Escape, however, was no longer feasible, for Edgar's extravagance and her inexperience had chained them to the place with fetters of debt. Tradesmen were no longer so accommodating, and friends from whom money had been borrowed showed peculiar coolness. It seemed there was nothing to be done but stay on in Johannesburg and economise, and this they mournfully proceeded to do until a final quarrel with Freeman Cohen drove Edgar out of South Africa for ever.

Cohen, both as an influential financier and the proprietor of the *Rand Daily Mail*, reserved the right to direct the paper on important matters of policy, but in the summer of 1903 found



Miss Emma Hutchinson's touring company: Polly Richards (on extreme left) in her last days.

himself in surprising conflict with an obstinate editor. It was on a matter of some importance to Cohen, for he had personally guaranteed £250,000 towards a Government loan for the development of certain gold-mines in the Transvaal, and the proposed profits to the Government from the total loan of £30,000,000 vitally concerned him. Cohen wished to steer the policy of the paper in one direction; Edgar, who thought he knew better, in another. With his own prosperity and that of the gold-mines at stake, Cohen not unnaturally refused to be argued down; Edgar, with nothing to lose but his opinion of his own infallibility, chose the wrong moment to be obdurate. The quarrel, conducted behind closed doors, sent a tremor of rumour and alarm through the whole building. Nobody knew with certainty what was happening, but when Edgar, pale almost to the point of phosphorescence, stalked into the office and with a melodramatic compression of the lips scrawled "Edgar Wallace: Finis!" on his blotting-pad, there was no longer any doubt as to who had had the final word in the argument. He appeared to be in a state of mind bordering on despair—as, indeed, he had good cause to be, for the edifice of success which he had built for himself in Johannesburg had crumbled at a touch, after only nine months. He was heavily in debt, owing some hundreds of pounds to tradesmen and acquaintances; in ready money he had little more than would be needed for his and Ivy's steamship fare to England. He felt humiliated and betrayed, and his own conscience, perhaps, was none too comfortable; the golden opportunity of Johannesburg had been carelessly squandered, and there was nothing left. He made a melancholy round of the building, saying good-bye. As the wretchedness of his situation pressed upon him he solemnised these final handshakes with threats of suicide, and alarmed his colleagues by hinting that it might be better for all concerned if he put them into execution that very night. Fearful for his safety, they refused to let him leave the office

alone, and accompanied him down the dusty ladderway and along the street to Heath's Hotel, where there was a last lugubrious round of farewell drinks. Half a dozen of them still clung to him on the way home, and left him with confidence only on his own doorstep, when the thought of breaking the news to Ivy had apparently sobered him, and he had reluctantly promised not to lay his revengeful death at the door of Freeman Cohen.

The voyage home was not a cheerful one. Ivy was still tragically grieving for her lost child, Edgar was brooding on the debts he had left behind, and the future was far from bright. He had only £80 in the world, and in a last optimistic attempt to convert this into riches lost most of it over the poker table to more experienced passengers. They arrived home with six shillings between them, and no assets beyond the half-finished play about Cecil Rhodes, and the possibilities of Edgar's imagination. His gold watch and chain were pawned for £12, and they took rooms in a boarding-house in Lordship Lane, Dulwich, where fortunately Edgar's prosperous appearance precluded any suspicious demands for advance payment.

While Ivy unpacked Edgar went down to Carmelite House and saw Marlowe. His relations with the *Daily Mail* had been kept sweet during the nine months in Johannesburg by occasional articles on South African affairs, and with anonymous paragraphs of news "from Our Own Correspondent." He had written a series on "Africa To-day," and picturesque accounts of "The Beaten Boer," the slums of Johannesburg, and the introduction of Chinese coolie labour into the Rand. He had also written an article on Lord Milner, suggesting that South Africa would be pleased if her High Commissioner were relieved of his office—a supposition which had stung Milner into undignified irritability, undiminished by his recognition of the writer as the troublesome war correspondent who had behaved with such unethical sharpness over the Peace Treaty. The

forceful expression of such opinions, though they may not have pleased Milner, had at least kept Edgar's name on the pages of the *Daily Mail* and in the memory of its editor. Marlowe greeted Edgar with pleasure, and on hearing that he had grown tired of being an editor in South Africa and had a democratic fancy for joining the *Mail* in some capacity, took him to see John Cowley, the general manager, who offered him a reporter's job at £15 a week, and politely refrained from expressing surprise when Edgar asked for the immediate advance of a month's money.

His spirits soared, as they always did after any reverse, when his faith in his own resilience seemed justified. For what, after all, had he lost by the sudden change? Money, it is true, for £750 a year is not £2,000, but on the other hand he was no longer in South Africa, tied to a mining town which, for all its wealth, had the narrow mentality of a suburban parish. He was in Fleet Street, where he had so long desired to set his feet; where everything, as he believed, was gloriously possible. He was not, indeed, an editor any longer, but the foot-loose freedom of the special correspondent was his once more, and his buoyant optimism assured him that of the two positions the lesser offered richer opportunity. The fame of his exploits as a war correspondent still lingered in the corridors of Carmelite House, and his new colleagues remembered enough about him to ask flattering questions about the adventure of Vereeniging. Yet it was still necessary, as he soon discovered, to prove himself all over again in these new surroundings, since reputation, especially in Fleet Street, is a perishable asset, and there were journalists like Charlie Hands and Philip Gibbs on the staff who dwarfed the newcomer from South Africa by comparison. Nevertheless he believed it would be easy to re-establish himself, and the very fact of being in Fleet Street was a wonderful stimulus. There was a pleasure even in walking down Carmelite Street to the office, in dropping into the Press

Club for a game of cards, impressing the other members with the expensiveness of his cigarettes and the flamboyance of his hats; he clung to those South African hats as to a part of his identity, making a concession to metropolitan taste only by the purchase of patent-leather button boots and white spats.

Soon he was able to move from the boarding-house in Lordship Lane to a furnished house in Flanders Road, Bedford Park. He had all sorts of schemes in mind, and the debts in South Africa could afford to wait. The play about Cecil Rhodes, for instance—that was sure to be a money-maker. Soon Leonard Rayne would be in London, taking his annual holiday between touring seasons, and the hospitality of the Johannesburg bungalow should be made to pay dividends.

It was during his first few weeks in London that Edgar received an unexpected visit from Polly Richards. How she had discovered him is not difficult to imagine: his name had in all probability appeared in the *Daily Mail* over London news stories, and once she had realised that he was in England he would be easy to trace. Polly, it seemed, was growing old, and she had gone down in the world. Her only daughter, Joey, had died many years before, and although she had kept in touch with her daughter's child (christened Alice Grace Adeline, after Miss Marriott and her daughters) she had become somewhat estranged since her son-in-law's second marriage. For some years she had been with a touring company run by Miss Emma Hutchison, who had proved herself a friend and had allowed her to act as her housekeeper during the increasingly long periods when she was out of work, or, as it is professionally expressed, "resting"; but now Miss Hutchison's company was temporarily idle, and Polly herself was failing, and alone. Exactly what she hoped to achieve by making herself known to the son whom she had never wanted, and whom she had not seen for more than twenty years, one can only guess. She was old and poor, and would no doubt have been thankful to be

relieved of the weary necessity of work. Her son, though by no means a rich man, had at least made some name for himself in the newspaper world, and she probably hoped that he would be persuaded to help her. Certainly she can never, until this last interview, have guessed how strong and deep-seated was his bitterness against her; how he had been brought up to regard her as the heartless betrayer who had abandoned him at birth, or how little time had done to soften the harshness of his prejudice. This unrelenting hostility is not easy to understand in a man whose natural impulses were generous, who knew through experience the cruel pinch of poverty, and whose open-handedness in later years became a legend. Indeed, his childhood conception of her, unconsciously fostered by the indignant Freemans, is the only possible explanation of the one completely ungenerous action of his life. For Polly was unsympathetically received. The interview was a short and, one cannot but suppose, a painful one. Ivy learned with distress, when Mrs. Richards had gone, that Edgar had frankly told her to expect nothing.

It is unlikely that she was sent away empty-handed, but she was certainly not encouraged to hope that he would help her further, and did not appeal again. When, a few months later, playing a small part with a touring company in Bradford, her frail health finally gave way, she appears to have been quite penniless. She was removed to Bradford Infirmary, and the company of necessity went on without her. She died in November of the same year, while Edgar was in Canada; she was described by the registrar as "an actress of no fixed place of residence," and certified as having died of senile phthisis. She had no money, and was moreover not insured, and it was only by the intervention of Joey's husband (who had been informed, too late, of her illness) that she was saved the final ignominy of being "buried by the parish." It was owing, too, to his kind offices that this lonely woman, of whom nothing was known in

Bradford, was buried in Catholic ground, and her prayer book sent as a last relic to her son.

His mother's death, and the wretched circumstances in which she had died, affected Edgar deeply, and one cannot help suspecting that his chief emotion was one of self-reproach. At all events, there is some suggestion of an attempt to make amends for repented harshness in the fact that, learning a few years later that his half-sister, Josephine Donovan, had left a child, he wrote kindly to the girl, claiming her as his niece, and made a special journey to Cheshire to see her. Miss Donovan, who had been seventeen at the time of Polly's death, remembered her grandmother vividly, and with affection. Until the time of her father's second marriage she had received many visits from "Grandma Richards," and had kept up a childish correspondence with her; so that she was able in some measure to correct Edgar's original opinion of his mother. It is, indeed, through Miss Donovan's eyes that we have our last authentic glimpse of Polly Richards. She remembers her as tolerant, kindly, and rather stout, still possessed of some of the quiet humour which poverty and misfortune had not entirely quenched, a "most lovable and affectionate woman—generous to a fault." Careless and improvident, like many actresses, she would (though rarely in her latter years earning more than a pittance) "give her last penny away." In temperament she thus seems to have been not unlike her son, though she lacked his spark of genius, and her life was unrewarded and obscure. There seems at least to have been something of his stoical indifference to defeat in the way in which she accepted the rebuff of their last encounter, turned her back on London, and went on alone to Bradford to work and die.

Edgar had been with the *Daily Mail* only a few weeks when Marlowe surprised and flattered him by sending him to Canada. There were two reasons at that particular time for sending a correspondent to the Dominion—the Alaska-

Canadian boundary dispute, and Alfred Harmsworth's opposition to Joseph Chamberlain's proposed preferential corn duties. Edgar's instructions were to give voice to Canadian resentment against the recent decision of the Alaska Boundary Commission in London, which by the casting vote of Lord Alverstone had ceded the disputed strip of Alaskan coastline to the United States; also to discover opposition to Chamberlain's programme of tariff reform, christened by Chamberlain himself the Big Loaf Programme, and by the *Daily Mail*, less favourably, the Stomach Tax. Alaskan indignation was easy to handle. "You cannot overestimate," Edgar cabled from Winnipeg, "the injury done to the Imperial idea by the award:" but hostility to Chamberlain had to be dropped as soon as it was taken up, for Harmsworth had changed his mind and was now supporting tariff reform for all he was worth—an about-face which took most of the policy stuffing out of Edgar's articles. He wandered about Canada for several weeks, gathering material as he had done during the South African war, from chance encounters and casual conversations. They were dull to write and not very interesting to read. He comforted himself with a fur-lined overcoat bought on expenses.

Nevertheless, the Canadian articles seemed to satisfy Harmsworth's requirements, for the cables which reached Edgar in Winnipeg were encouraging. This was a great relief to him, for he had been haunted, in spite of his appearance of self-confidence, by a fear that the *Daily Mail* would find him out; that his lack of experience, for all his nine months' editorship in Johannesburg, would let him down when it came to performing the routine tasks of a reporter. Cheered by Harmsworth's approbation he sailed from New York in better conceit with himself than he had been in since his sudden deflation by Freeman Cohen, and the journey was diverted by poker and new acquaintances. He struck up a shipboard friendship with that somewhat absurd Colossus of American politics, William

Jennings Bryan, who was still hoping to be President of the United States, and was humourlessly eager to preach his theories to anyone who would listen. Edgar appears, for the time being at least, to have admired him; perhaps he was genuinely impressed by the old man's oratory, which had earned him the epithet of "silver-tongued" and was of the authentic, professional, spell-binding variety; perhaps he was hypnotised by Bryan's belief that he would one day be President. At all events he confided to the big American that his wife was expecting a second child; that if it were a boy he would like to christen him Bryan, and that he would consider it an honour if the senator would stand as godfather. This Bryan graciously consented to do, and the voyage ended amicably. Edgar was pleased with the idea that a child of his might have a United States President for godfather, and Bryan was doubtless flattered by the respectful tone of Edgar's *Daily Mail* interview.

Back in Carmelite House, Edgar now found himself less of a special correspondent than a reporter, and to his disgust was assigned to a series of statistical articles on unemployment. It was a kind of work he had never done before, and he despised and hated it. The conditions he had to investigate, the poor homes into which he had to pry, stirred memories of things which he would rather have forgotten. He had travelled a long way since he had been an insignificant urchin in just such streets as these, and he found himself out of touch and out of sympathy with the people who lived in them. By this time even Mrs. Anstee no longer heard from him; he had never, as she had hoped, taken Ivy to visit her, and the Freemans could count on his presence only at funerals. He chafed under these obligatory investigations into poverty; he knew the details of the scene too well already, and had lost interest. Unfortunately, when he had completed one series on unemployment the *Daily Mail* regarded him as an authority on the subject, and whenever it felt that the topic was due for an airing detached Edgar from more congenial

occupations and sent him into the East End of London. "They dropped on me this morning to go to the East End and do one of those rotten unemployed stories," he wrote to Ivy two years later. "This is a particularly trying job for me for it means at least a week's work. . . . As you probably know I hate the British working man; I have no sympathy with him; whether he lives or dies, feeds or starves, is not of the slightest interest to me. I have had two years of this kind of work and I do not want any more of it. However, they are so keen on it and I cannot afford to lose any sort of advertisement just now so off I go." Twenty years of changing fortune had to be lived through before, in the safe harbour of success, he was able to write: "The clean, decent poor! Their women are more wonderful than the daughters of kings. I've shopped with them, stood at their front doors talking to them—they seldom asked you inside for fear you saw their makeshifts. Their lace curtains white as snow, the perennial geraniums behind the polished glass of their front windows, the chicken-houses and pigeon-lofts in the back yard above which on Tuesdays and Wednesdays waved and fluttered the spotless banners of their decency . . ."

In the early months of 1904 he unexpectedly achieved one of his dearest ambitions, and found it disappointing. Ever since he had sat in the partitioned closet which had served the purpose of editor's room in the *Rand Daily Mail* he had cherished a vision of himself as a London editor: it had seemed to him at the time the highest good fortune which could befall a man as genuinely in love as he was, then, with journalism. This ambition was suddenly achieved when Walter J. Evans, the editor of the *Evening News*, was sent north by Harmsworth to reorganise the Manchester office, and it became necessary to put in a temporary acting editor. For some weeks Edgar had been trying his hand on the advertising side of Carmelite House, as the result of an idea he had had for bringing out special "Shoppers' Editions" of the *Evening News*. These Shoppers'

Editions, which it was hoped would have been sponsored in turn by the big department stores, had fallen rather flat; the scheme was too expensive for the advertisers, and had been abandoned after only three numbers. Thus it happened that Edgar was still haunting the *Evening News* in the character of a man of ideas whose brain-child had come to a bad end through no fault of his own, when the editor's chair fell temporarily vacant, and he was experimentally promoted to it.

It was a flattering promotion, though it carried no rise of salary, but he quickly found the restricted routine annoying. There was no more strolling into the office at twelve o'clock and luxuriously whiling away the time until he was given an assignment: it was necessary to be at his desk at an hour when normally Ivy would be softly waking him with a cup of tea, and his afternoons were made hideous by successive editions. He found himself full of ideas for the paper, but impatient of the routine necessary to put them in practice. Most of all he hated being tied to the office, and thought with regret of some of his past assignments as a reporter, when it had been possible to combine a special interview with a lengthy luncheon, and perhaps even an hour at Kempton Park into the bargain. He discovered that it was not easy for editors to slip away to the Press Club for an afternoon's poker: no sooner did he put on his hat and stroll across to Wine Office Court than Alfred Harmsworth would ring up and be annoyed at being answered by a secretary, and a panting office boy would be sent across with a message that the Chief was on the war-path. His ideas were often amusing and original (his scheme for a National Turf Bank for the protection of the punter's money and the bookmaker's person engaged Harmsworth's half-serious attention for a week or two) but in the pleasant occupation of elaborating them he often allowed the paper to be late. This deadliest of all evening paper sins—the missing of a train by an edition—produced a feeling of slackness in the office,

and an ominous growl from the more important advertisers.

To tell the truth, Edgar had more to worry him than his colleagues supposed. Ivy was on the point of a second confinement, and was depressed and nervous. This time her mother could not be with her, and she was full of apprehension. Partly to cheer her and partly to set his own mind at rest (since it was always possible that he might be sent abroad on a story before the child was born) Edgar had cabled to South Africa for one of her sisters, and such a request had necessarily been accompanied by the steamship fare, which had been expensive. Dunning letters, too, from South Africa were worrying him: the sums they demanded were considerable, and the fact that he threw them away as soon as they arrived did not stop them from coming. The confinement itself, besides, would be a costly matter, and Ivy's precarious state of health suggested that she might make a slow recovery. The only immediate prospect of salvation lay in the Cecil Rhodes play, which was now finished and which Leonard Rayne had accepted for his South African season. After much thought Edgar had called it *An African Millionaire*, and had veiled the character of Cecil Rhodes with only the thinnest of disguises. It had everything, as he thought, to please a South African public. If only they could safely tide over the next few months prosperity was certain.

Ivy gave birth to a son at the end of April, and Edgar ran William Jennings Bryan to earth in his hotel and brought him to the christening. The child was named Bryan for the senator and Edgar for his father, and received from his godfather the somewhat frantic christening gift of a volume of Tolstoy. Edgar himself was presented with a top hat which the senator had bought for himself in London and which was several sizes too large. He received this surprising gift with non-committal politeness. It fitted neither of them.

When the child was barely a month old, and Ivy's health was still giving Edgar reason for anxiety, Raisuli, the Moroccan

sharîf who had made himself dictator of Tangier, kidnapped a rich American and his English step-son, holding them to ransom for £14,000, and Edgar was snatched from the *Evening News* and rushed out to Morocco for the story. The story itself contained all the elements of melodrama, and there was sufficient colour in the character of Raisuli himself, in the boy Sultan from whose government he demanded the ransom, and in the country, to provide Edgar with limitless material after his own heart; but for all that the hard bones of fact were difficult to disinter. Raisuli, a brigand of considerable charm and no scruples, had retreated to the Rif mountains with his valuable hostages; he was holding out for £14,000 in cash, the governorship of his district, the release from prison of a number of his friends, and the imprisonment instead of various government officials who had had the tactlessness to put him in jail some time before. His position with regard to the government being, on all these counts, somewhat delicate, he did not choose to make himself accessible to reporters, and his captives, Mr. Perdicaris and Mr. Varley, were naturally not allowed to be accessible to anybody. The British Legation, anxious not to compromise the British policy (following the Anglo-French agreement two months earlier) of non-intervention in Morocco, was in a constant sweat of apprehension, and none too communicative, and the twenty-three-year-old Sultan was surrounded by a watchful entourage and helplessly committed politically in half a dozen directions. To add to Edgar's difficulties he knew no Arabic, and his French, laboriously and inaccurately acquired in Johannesburg, proved baffling to the natives. However, handicaps of this description are not supposed to hamper special correspondents, and Edgar quickly decided that the best thing for him to do was to secure something sensational and exclusive. Yet how was this to be done? It was all very well to send routine stories of Mr. Perdicaris's ill-health in captivity, and the promptness with which Raisuli had summoned a

doctor; to describe the general European feeling in Tangier as hostile to America on account of her failure to take immediate and decisive action; to report that French troops were being drafted to Morocco and that British residents were clamouring for protection. What the *Daily Mail* wanted, as he very well knew, was the impossible feat of a personal interview with Raisuli.

He avoided the other correspondents as much as possible, leaving them with the uncomfortable feeling that he had got hold of something. He pottered gingerly about Tangier on horseback (a bicycle would have been undignified, to say nothing of unprocurable) and had the mortification of falling off in the market-place and spraining his ankle. He hid himself in his hotel for days at a time, smoking and writing, and received mysterious visits from a Tangier bank official. The result of this preoccupation appeared in the *Daily Mail* on the 20th of June in the shape of a long and picturesque letter addressed to its Own Correspondent in Tangier, Mr. Edgar Wallace, by Raisuli himself. It was a well-written letter, curiously familiar in style, but with just enough pious reference to Allah to convince the suspicious. It explained the motives behind the kidnapping (already sufficiently well known), spoke reassuringly of the health and treatment of Mr. Perdicaris, complained in poetical terms about the behaviour of the Sultan, and said some very pleasing things about the *Daily Mail*. The *Mail* gave some prominence to the story, but abstained from comment. It was introduced simply by Edgar's own description of the arrival of the letter—the clatter of horses' hoofs in the paved courtyard of the hotel, the crying of his name, the salaaming messenger, the invocations of Allah—all the local colour, in fact, which one would wish to see surrounding the delivery of a communication from a brigand chieftain to a London newspaper. Opinion in Fleet Street was somewhat divided on the subject of this letter. Officially it was regarded as a brilliant scoop, but it was also rumoured, even within

Carmelite House itself, to be nothing more or less than an impudent fake. Edgar himself was never explicit on the matter: if the letter were a complete invention from beginning to end, he had run considerable risk of exposure from Raisuli himself, who was by no means ill-informed as to the activities of the Press. Then, too, Raisuli seems to have been not entirely averse from letter-writing, even though he had made up his mind to grant no interviews, for the correspondent of another newspaper, sent out post-haste to Tangier to outdo the *Mail*, eventually, after some weeks of negotiation through an American impresario (who had rushed to Tangier with a train of mules bearing silver in the hope of persuading Raisuli to join a variety troupe), secured a second letter, specifically addressed to his particular newspaper. In the final analysis it is possible that Edgar had, by some means, received a formal written communication from Raisuli (the "we should like to put your case before the public" gambit has often been surprisingly successful) and in translation had resourcefully padded it out to fill a column.

Edgar was kept in Morocco a little more than a month, and managed to sustain the colourful quality of his news stories to the end, in spite of the fact that he was sick with impatience to be home. Ivy was not well, though she wrote cheerfully, and he longed for the pleasure of seeing and holding his son. He was anxious, too, to hear from Leonard Rayne in South Africa, for his play, he knew, had gone into production at the Cape Town Opera House on the very day when he had been putting the picturesque "praise Allahs" into Raisuli's letter, and he was in a fever of impatience to hear how the play had been received. Leonard Rayne himself, when Edgar had seen the company off at Waterloo Station, had spoken reassuringly, and had specially mentioned the play in his glossy circulars as a new work "by Mr. Edgar Wallace, the famous war correspondent." What Leonard Rayne did not realise at the time, however, and found

out only when he had put the play into rehearsal, was that the piece contained improbabilities and faults of construction which were almost insuperable. For all his eagerness to learn from the theatre in Johannesburg Edgar had failed to grasp even the most elementary rules of stagecraft, and creaking situations had been made worse by unnatural dialogue. Rayne had occasion to tear his hair, too, over the mechanical blunders. In one scene, for instance, Edgar had left his characters in climbing dress on a full stage-set of the top of Table Mountain; in the following scene, without even the lapse of an interval, they were to be found in evening dress on another full set—the lounge of a Cape Town hotel. An extra scene had had to be written in to be played before the curtain while the scene-shifters struggled with the transformation—an expedient which had improved nobody's temper. Then, too, in disguising the central character of Cecil Rhodes, Edgar had been in several minds as to what name he should give him, with the result that the hero's name differed with every act. There had been trouble during rehearsal, as well, with the native cast, for Edgar, wishing no doubt to illustrate the Imperial Idea as graphically as possible, had written an "indaba" scene requiring a big crowd of African natives; and the stage manager had rounded up a mixed lot of Zulus, Hottentots, Basutos and Matabele, who had endured one rehearsal and then disappeared into the native quarter with their wages, the light comedian's hand-made boots and the leading man's overcoat.

After a series of such vicissitudes the play had at last been produced, and had run for six nights. The Cape Town critics had been pointedly unkind. Even the *Cape Times*, so staunch a friend and ally in the past, had found little to say in its favour, and Rayne had decided to drop it from his programme when he moved on to Johannesburg and Kimberley. It was already written off as a failure and forgotten when the news of its reception greeted Edgar in England. It was a bitter blow, the

more painful for being so utterly unexpected. Consciously and unconsciously he had been counting on the play to extricate him from a thousand financial difficulties; more, he had even hoped that it would make his name as a playwright, and open yet another avenue to the desideratum he always dreamed of—easy fortune. And now the substantial returns that he had counted on for so long had vanished like a dream. As a playwright, it appeared, he was a failure. The trick of success which he had studied so intently in the Johannesburg theatre had not been learned after all; the formula had eluded him. There was nothing to be done but start again, and wait for his magical optimism to lift him once again out of despondency, to make him forget—as he had managed to forget before—this latest failure. He sent Ivy and the baby into lodgings on Sydenham Hill while he dealt with writs, bailiffs, judgments and arrears of rent, and made preparations for moving to Notting Hill Gate, where he was not known to the tradesmen.

No. 37 Elgin Crescent, Notting Hill, was a plaster-fronted Victorian house which had outlived its pretensions, and Ivy and Edgar settled in with the reassuring conviction that here, at least, they would be able to make both ends meet. Edgar drew up a programme of immense journalistic output, Ivy undertook the house-work with the help of a mystified general servant, and they tacked up framed photographs and fretwork brackets to make themselves at home. Ivy did the cooking (sometimes, it is true, with unforeseen results) and Edgar sat in his study rocking the baby with one hand and writing with the other. This was no hardship to him, for he loved children, and had an almost feminine reluctance to see them grow older. While the child was an infant he asked nothing better than to carry him about on his arm, or to rock his pram gently as he sat at his desk, smoking his pipe and composing his *Daily Mail* articles. Soon, however, he decided that he needed a secretary. He had revived "Smithy," the Cockney Tommy who had been such a

boon to his South African war dispatches, and was writing a series of humorous sketches round him for the *Daily Mail* leader page, in addition to his ordinary reporter's duties. Smithy was popular, and a convenient peg on which to hang endless narrative and commentary on the army. Humorous, rousing or sentimental—any topic was grist to Smithy's mill: the articles were written at night, when the day's work was done, and typed (since Edgar himself never became expert with the typewriter) by a junior conveyancing clerk in a solicitor's office who was glad of the extra money. Mr. Wood (for that was the young man's name) was neither a rapid shorthand writer nor an infallible typist, but he was industrious and willing, and with his help Edgar first discovered a talent for dictation. It was easy and pleasant to come home in the early evening after an assignment, dictate a column to Mr. Wood and send him down to Carmelite House with it while one ate one's supper—far easier and pleasanter than going down to the office oneself and writing in the noisy discomfort of the reporters' room. His Smithy articles and the descriptive stories in which he took such pride he still wrote out meticulously by hand, taking time and thought; but the detested unemployment series and routine work could be reeled off to Mr. Wood while Edgar dandled the baby, and with practice the habit of dictation became second nature.

At this time the Russo-Japanese war had been in progress for several months, but, since it was a history of almost uninterrupted reverses for the Russians, was receiving only desultory attention from the newspapers, which felt that they could leave such monotonous activities to the agencies. On November 1st, however, part of the Russian fleet, steaming down the North Sea from the Baltic on its way to the East, hysterically fired on and sank some British trawlers, and the admiral responsible for the order attempted to cover his mistake by insisting that the trawlers were acting as a screen for

Japanese destroyers. The battleships then hurried off to join the rest of the Russian fleet which was coaling at Vigo, and, this unlucky incident having promoted the war to the front page in England, Edgar was dispatched to the Spanish port to get the truth of the incident from the lips of the Russian sailors. He hurriedly brought home a new acquaintance to comfort Ivy, who was growing increasingly mournful about her loneliness, and left for Spain in his opulent fur-lined overcoat. At Vigo, which he reached a few hours before the arrival of the battleships, he engaged a couple of Spaniards to act as scouts and interpreters, with instructions to look out for Russian sailors who might provide a story; and by this means was put in touch with two petty officers, one of whom spoke English, who were spending a quiet evening in a brothel. They were just drunk enough to be talkative, and with the help of a little more wine gave Edgar the Russian version of the incident—of how, in the fog off the Dogger Bank, the admiral had had a vision of Japanese destroyers, and in a panic of nerves which did not allow him to enquire how the Japanese ships could have suddenly circled half the world and be lurking in the North Sea, had given the order to fire. Edgar wired the sailors' narrative to London, and received in return instructions to proceed to Tangier, which was the Russian fleet's next port of call on its way to the Pacific Ocean. By the time that the fleet had put in there, however, the international tension produced by the sinking of the trawlers had been relieved in the traditional manner by diplomatic apologies, and the most interesting news which Edgar picked up was that his informants, who had unwittingly supplied the *Daily Mail* with a good news story at some loss of face to the Russian navy, had been ferreted out by the exasperated admiral and buried at sea between Vigo and Tangier. The fleet then proceeded nervously through the Mediterranean towards the East, where they were briskly sunk on arrival by the Japanese, and Edgar, faintly dismayed but on

the whole well satisfied with his achievement, went back to enjoy Christmas at Elgin Crescent.

He found Ivy all the more cheerful for having a new friend—a lively and sensible young woman called Florence Thornton-Smith whom he had met on the *Evening News*, and had introduced at Elgin Crescent before his departure. She was working at the time on the woman's page of that newspaper, writing notes and articles under the pseudonym of "Janet," and it was under this name that he found her already on terms of affectionate intimacy with Ivy and Bryan. Ivy was glad of her confidence and company, for three years of marriage had done nothing to dissipate her shyness, and she found it difficult, almost impossible, to make new friends. With Edgar usually in Fleet Street, and often abroad, she was much alone, and even when they were together showed a timid reluctance to go out with him. She confided to Janet that she sometimes spoke to no one for days together, and had even gone out and talked to children in the street from a morbid fear that she would lose her voice. Janet, with the cheerful alertness and slight cynicism of a woman who for some years had earned her living in the rough and tumble of Fleet Street, acted on quiet Ivy like a tonic, and if she did not succeed in emancipating her from the reserve which was fast setting her in the mould of a confirmed stay-at-home, at least helped her to take a philosophic view of Edgar's volatility, which responded disturbingly to female flattery and gave him an increasing zest for amusing company. Maturity had given him an added attraction for women, and though his heart was still undeniably with Ivy he showed great susceptibility to their admiration. Since Ivy apparently preferred to stay at home his friends rarely saw him in his wife's company, and among them there were, not surprisingly, some who were not averse to regarding him as a bachelor. Ivy at first regarded his flirtations with alarm, until she discovered that they were of a transient and casual nature, and had less to do with sentiment

than vanity. Janet, who had become her ally, took the reassuring attitude that they were rather comic, and before long Ivy found herself able, at Edgar's request, to answer the telephone to his more tiresome pursuers, obediently telling them that he was not at home, while Edgar sat within reach of the instrument, placidly smoking. He had already by the summer of 1905 come unscathed through one ardent flirtation which had caused her some heart-burning, and now, bored with the lady and very hard up, was discovering with penitent affection the attractions of Ivy, and was busy with a new scheme which, as usual, was to establish his name, rout the bailiffs, and make his fortune.

He had written one or two short stories, but with indifferent success, and now was determined to try his hand at a novel. The stories, if they had done nothing else, had at least taught him some of his own limitations, and he was beginning to form an idea of the kind of fiction in which he was most likely to succeed. His attempts at romantic stories had been a failure. The "love interest" considered so necessary to popular fiction left him cold; when he tried to drag it in by the ears it read like a serial from a parish magazine, and annoyed and disgusted him. He decided that he knew too little of women to make them convincing; or, at least, that as soon as he tried to translate them into narrative and dialogue they moved with the wooden jerkiness of Punch and Judy, and gave utterance to sentiments which made him groan as he read them. No; for his first attempt at a novel he would leave women alone. He would embark on a theme which had more in common with the Sexton Blakes of boyhood than the stories which had their crises in conservatories and ended with a wedding. Only, of course, his story would be up to date, with Scotland Yard in full cry and a background of mystery and politics. He had already conceived an idea and hit on a title. It was to be called *The Four Just Men*, and was to have this exciting peculiarity—the public was to be invited to solve the mystery.

He had no sooner become absorbed in the plotting of his story than Ivy expressed a desire to visit South Africa. She had long been homesick for her own family and friends; Mrs. Caldecott had been ill, and was anxious to see her; and now, with the baby grown into a handsome little boy of eighteen months, it seemed the ideal moment for a prolonged visit. Edgar, busy with his story and his schemes, was willing for her to go, although as the day of parting approached he became deeply emotional over the idea of separation, and found himself more in love with Ivy than he had been on any occasion since their marriage. Ivy, however, had set her heart on the visit, and Edgar exhausted his ready money so that she should take not only the child but their general servant, Susan, into the bargain. She should go to South Africa in style, and want for nothing. As for himself, he would engage a temporary man-servant, and do nothing but work. If *The Four Just Men* met with the success which was almost inevitable he would take a lengthy holiday from the *Daily Mail* and join her in South Africa.

Ivy sailed on the 16th of September, and Edgar, alone in Elgin Crescent except for a man-servant called Tombs (who appears, suitably enough, to have been a phenomenally heavy sleeper), plunged into feverish work on *The Four Just Men*. He hated solitude, and for this reason found it more comfortable to do his writing in the evening at Janet's flat, where he could read the successive chapters aloud to an interested audience, and discuss his plans for making it a certain best-seller. He had not found it as easy as he had hoped to interest a publisher, and so had conceived the practical notion of publishing it himself, taking a room in Temple Chambers and calling his new venture the Tallis Press. By this means, he reasoned, he would avoid having to divide his profits with a grasping publisher; the advertising of the book would be in his own hands, and the Tallis Press would be useful for issuing his collected *Smithy*

sketches in book form, and other publications. He could think of nothing else but his splendid book. The advertising of it particularly appealed to him, for it seemed to him that if a book were sufficiently publicised, if prizes were offered for the solution of the mystery, if the title leapt at the public from every newspaper, every bookshop window and every hoarding, there could be no possible limit to the demand, and the sales could not fail to break all existing records. He had at first thought of offering £1,000 for the correct solution of the method by which the four just men disposed of the wicked Foreign Secretary in the story, but he was talked out of this ambitious offer by his *Daily Mail* colleagues. "At the earnest representation of people in the office who know," he wrote to Ivy, "I have made a sweeping change in my prize award. It has been pointed out that £1,000 would probably scare everybody and I have reluctantly reduced it to £500 and split it up into a first prize of £250, a second of £100, a third of £50, a fourth of £25, a fifth of £25 and fifty prizes of £1. I think this will be much better and will not alarm those people who think there is a swindle in all big prizes." The scheme must at all costs be kept clear of any implication of swindle. The £500 prize money would come, of course, out of the enormous profits of the book, as well as £1,000 worth of advertising. The excitement of the advertising scheme soon eclipsed his interest even in the book itself.

His brain teemed with ideas for making it a best-seller. Why, if one advertised sufficiently, if one drummed on the ears of the public night and day one could sell anything, *anything*; and this book, after all, was a very good thriller with a fat prize attached to it. If the knowledge that he had no money at all for these grandiose schemes made him pause for a moment, it was not for long. The book, if skilfully promoted, would bring in more than enough in the first week to pay for the advertising. His amazing confidence rose as it always did to a reckless gamble. Long before Ivy had had time to reach South Africa he was pouring

out his extravagant scheme to her by every mail. It must have caused her some uneasiness, since she knew that his resources had been all but exhausted by the passage money for herself, Susan and the baby, but she still faithfully believed that in all matters of business he would naturally know best, and replied with calm cheerfulness to his letters.

He had seen, he told her, the proper person at the *Daily Mail*, and had "mentioned casually" that he intended doing a "big advertising stunt." "Wareham asked me unconcernedly how much I wanted to spend and I as unconcernedly answered 'About £1,000.' 'All right,' said Wareham cheerfully, 'we will fix that up,' and thus was the most important part of my undertaking settled in the most prosaic manner possible. I shall be glad," he went on, "to have the book finished and off my conscience, for I am most anxious to get on with the advertising part of it. This latter is really the most important part . . . I am going to take a page of the *News of the World*, although I think the *News of the World* would be a much better advertising medium for a book that was slightly improper. As there are no women in my book this is out of the question, otherwise I think I might have made a concession to the immorality of the age and introduced some highly spiced incident." A few days later he had grown dissatisfied with purely newspaper advertising, and began to have visions of *The Four Just Men* springing like the characters of a Lyceum melodrama from every hoarding in London. Again the question of expense was waved aside. "It has occurred to me," he wrote to Ivy, "that since I am undertaking so much responsibility in regard to the publishing of *The Four Just Men* I might as well go a little further and undertake a little more, so in addition to the advertising . . . I have arranged for a thousand huge 16-sheet posters which are about as big as the side of the drawing-room . . . on which will be depicted the death of a new character whom I introduced but to slay, and

brief particulars of the competition. This will appear on 1,250 hoardings all over London, and if that does not sell the book, plus £1,000 worth of advertising, may I be damned! . . . I am carrying out, as you know, the ideas that I have consistently held for many years. I always said that the way to sell Shocker is exactly the same way as to fill a theatre playing melodrama." He was also hatching a scheme for "establishing book agencies in all the principal towns in England at all the principal stores with the object of forcing a circulation on the public in the American method." Very soon he had got estimates for his posters. "The cost of printing will be about £100," he wrote, "the cost of bill-posting will be about £171; for this I shall have 1,200 eight-sheet posters throughout the best residential suburbs of London and the city . . . I am arranging with the World Advertising Company to throw big pictures from *The Four Just Men* on to the screens in theatres." A few days later he had "secured notice boards over all the leading booksellers in London for the advertising of *The Four Just Men*" and had "ordered 2,000 miniature posters the size of an ordinary contents bill for exhibition in shop windows." He had had circulars printed, and had bought space in the *Daily Mail*, the *Evening News* and the *Daily Mirror*. He had had the book bound with a detachable competition form in the back page, and composed a modest appendix in which the reader was informed that "In the foregoing pages Mr. Edgar Wallace has told in a style which, we submit, at once places him in the forefront of living impressionist writers, a story of enthralling interest."

Could any man, he asked himself, do more? A book as well advertised as this could not possibly fail. "The nearer the day comes," he told Ivy, "the less doubt have I as to the success of the book. I believe I shall have not an ordinary success but a phenomenal one." And again: "I am beginning to lose all my doubts regarding *The Four Just Men*, I think it is going to have a

magnificent sale and I am quite prepared to see it go to anything. . . . If it fails then I am assured in my mind that it will be the most astounding and unaccountable failure that the world has ever seen." The suspense and excitement began to tell on his nerves. He caught cold, broke his false teeth, slept badly, and appeared almost daily at Janet's flat for sympathy and encouragement. The more he thought of it, the more he liked the idea of being his own publisher. His advertising had resulted in at least a tentative overture from a literary agent, and he had had the satisfaction of pointing out that "now I was doing my own publishing, as a publisher I was prepared to take all the stuff I wrote as an author, and that as an author I was perfectly satisfied with my treatment by myself as a publisher." He began to play with the idea of freeing himself from the *Daily Mail* and giving himself up to writing and publishing entirely, and considered how best to put the proposition to Alfred Harmsworth. "I thought of asking Alfred to give his consent to my starting in business for myself!" he wrote to Ivy; "that is to say to my making 21, Temple Chambers my office, and devoting the whole of my time to reading and writing. I could produce four books a year, and by the time I had got three or four on the market, my public would be assured. It is not such a foolish idea as it looks. . . . If I can give the public variety enough it does not matter how often I publish because I get a different public every time." Already he had formed a fairly shrewd idea of the type of fiction which best suited him. "This week I am sending you a book that I intended sending you last week, *A World Without A Child*, I think you will enjoy reading it. It is of course full of religious tosh, that seems to take with the blithering multitude, in fact religion and immorality are the only things that sell books nowadays. I am going to start a middle course and give them crime and blood and three murders to the chapter; such is the insanity of the age that I do not doubt for one moment the success of my venture. . . . Of

course you know my immoral love story is always at the back of my mind but somehow I haven't the nerve to write it. I am quite sure I could do it and I am quite sure the fact that I can never deal with the love interest in a story except in an improper manner is the main cause of my keeping women out of my stories. I think the conventional kiss and cuddle story would bore me to death to write, you know the kind I mean, the novel that ends like this: 'Angela raised her glorious eyes to the brown face of the man before her and laying her fluttering palms upon his broad shoulders whispered: "The past is dead, let us begin all over again." ' This is not the kind of story that I care to write, I am infinitely more at home in writing a story with a passage that goes somehow like this: 'The footsteps grew nearer and Bill tightened his hold on his knife. Then as the bulky figure of Colonel Blood loomed out of the fog he sprang forward with an oath and pushed his knife up to the hilt into the pirate's throat. Blood swayed and tottered and with a gurgling sound fell to his knees, the blood gushing forth with a loud hiss.' That is where I feel at home; I like actions, murderings, abductions, dark passages and secret trapdoors and the dull, slimy waters of the moat, pallid in the moonlight."

Harmsworth, however, was not willing to release him from the *Daily Mail*, and took a sceptical view of the activities of the Tallis Press. He also, after a hesitation of several days which had roused Edgar's most extravagant hopes, refused to put money into *The Four Just Men*, and Edgar wrote furiously to Ivy that Alfred had played him false, and in a fit of temper scrawled "Alfred Harmsworth, I will never forgive you!" on Janet's marble mantelpiece. Nor was Harmsworth's failure to back the venture his only anxiety. Bills for advertising and posters were beginning to come in, and the printers were showing a most unenterprising reluctance to regard his account in the light of a sporting venture. "Smack in the eye No. 1 was when Mather and Crowther demanded £171 in advance for bill-posting," he

wrote anxiously to Ivy. "As at the moment I had not got 171 shillings this was rather a serious difficulty." Janet, however, had loyally come to the rescue; she had wired at once to a friend and borrowed the money, and the financial collapse of the Tallis Press was temporarily averted. Edgar redoubled his efforts at publicity. He sent Mr. Wood and the long-suffering Tombs on endless rounds of the booksellers, demanding *The Four Just Men*; he posted a copy of the book to Joseph Chamberlain, with "a hint . . . that if by any chance he could find some way of dragging in the *F.J.M.* into a political speech I should everlastingly be obliged to him." Chamberlain, however, had "not yet replied to that letter."

The excitement and anxiety of this undertaking, on which he had risked so much, made him touchy and irritable, and when Ivy was rash enough to be a little too frank in her letters from South Africa he exploded emotionally with an extravagance that gave her a new and alarming sidelight on his character. On the voyage out she had made friends with a Mr. Wilson, who had paid her some attention, and soon after her arrival in Cape Town had invited her to the theatre. This incident, together with the rest of her family news, she had innocently reported in a letter, with the result that he fell into a passion of jealousy which made Janet, on whom the impact of the crisis chiefly fell, fear for his sanity. "I do *not* approve," he wrote to Ivy immediately, "of your going to the theatre with Mr. Wilson. Putting it baldly—as the world would put it—it is not discreet for a married woman to go out alone at night with a married man who is after all only a steamship acquaintance. That you did this has been the cause of great pain to me and the pain came at a time when I could least bear it. I know you don't flirt—at least I hope I know you don't, for after this amazing departure of yours I hardly know what to know. One gets a conception of a person and that conception is by some little thing suddenly upset. If one loves the person, as I love you, the

readjustment is horrible. I can truthfully and calmly say that my mental agony this week constitutes the greatest pain and the worst sorrow that ever came into my life—a hundred times more poignant than the death of our child . . . I believe Janet has saved me from going mad." After two days of hysteria he returned once more to the attack. "Whether you think I am mad or a brute I can't help; all that I know is that in this last week I have gone absolutely grey over the temples. . . . Lord, lord! how old I feel! How singularly awful were those two days of lunacy before Janet licked me into shape."

Janet, alarmed at the violence of his jealousy, and having a shrewd idea that it was at least partly caused by nervous exhaustion, thought it prudent to send Ivy an independent and reassuring account of the affair. "Your holiday is not to be spoiled," she wrote, "and do not take it too seriously. *My patience!* But I have had a time with your Dicky Wicky. *He* is all right now, but I am quite worn out. . . . For these last four days I have been battling with him, and have at last brought him back to his sane senses. . . . Tuesday and Wednesday he was terrible. The real truth was—although he won't have told you—that he was most awfully worried about meeting that poster bill and my real impression was (which he would never forgive) that he seized upon you as a sort of stalking horse for his anger. He will never admit this to you. . . . He had really worked himself up to a blind passion and I said quite seriously: 'If you talk to me any longer in this strain I will go straight to Sir Alfred and tell him that you are going mad and that Ivy must be sent for immediately.' . . . It seemed to sober him. . . . He came here yesterday afternoon really looking very bad—he hadn't slept and he was sure he was going mad. The truth was, he had simply let his emotions tear him to pieces, and he was down in the depths of despair. Well, first of all he would talk about nothing but the 'new Ivy!' then I made him talk about the poster difficulty. I said that was a *real* thing,

whereas the Wilson episode was a thing of the imagination. Then I suggested a way out of the poster difficulty, and do you know, after about 20 minutes he suddenly became quite normal and sane. So I am sure that was at the bottom of it all—though he will never admit anything so unromantic. . . . Privately I am sure that in one sense he had almost enjoyed this new sensation of jealousy, even though he had made himself ill. . . . He would never forgive me for writing in this strain, so mind you burn these dreadful lines. But you know that theatrical instinct! . . . I feel somehow that it is almost a waste of time to take him too seriously—but at the same time one is impressed by his fine acting, or shall I say his powers of expressing emotion? He really does feel it all—it is quite genuine—but the wonderful way in which he comes out of it and throws it off and forgets it quite staggers me!"

Ivy, astonished and alarmed, and wisely keeping Janet's interpretation to herself, wrote soothingly from Cape Town expressing her penitence, and promising never to see the diabolical Mr. Wilson again. She received in reply a rather shamefaced letter of forgiveness. "Jealousy," he wrote, "is a very horrible thing because it may so easily affect one's whole life—and there are 6,000 miles and three weeks between explanations. I wonder at myself for feeling as I do—or as I did. It was unworthy of me and unjust to you. . . . Dearest, I am very unhappy without you. You do not know how much you bulk in my life nor how great is the vacancy you have left. I get so utterly miserable and so depressed sometimes that I hardly know what to do with myself. You don't mind my telling you the truth, do you? You know how long my moods last and that probably by the time this reaches you I shall be altogether a different man. . . . The worst I have thought of you or said of you is that you have absolutely no worldly knowledge and that you have the faith which only a good pure girl can have in the goodness and purity of others. . . . Can a

married woman knowingly receive the marked attention of another man and preserve her innocence? I say no, emphatically no. I say this of all the married women I know, including of course R— . . . A married woman who flirts is like a high-placed cashier who steals stamps. The peculations are inconsiderable, but the spirit that dictated the theft would, given opportunity and necessity, bring about a robbery of bonds."

Gradually the storm, which, as he confessed, had been "raging within the restricted area of a tea-cup," blew over, and he was able to turn his attention once more to the satisfaction and anxieties of *The Four Just Men*. The reviews had been good, and it was selling splendidly. Nevertheless, the profits were being swallowed as fast as they came in by the advertising bills, and the thought of the prize money, which sooner or later would have to be paid, hung over him like a nightmare. Solutions of the murder mystery were pouring in, and some of them, he had to admit, were excellent. A firm which specialised in competition solutions had even taken it up, and the artful proposition put forward had caused him considerable amusement. "A man came to me and asked if I would have any objection to his advertising in the *Daily Mail* and other papers that the true solution of the *F.J.M.* would be furnished for sixpence. I told him I had not the slightest objection. He is what I call a solution merchant who does a large business in this sort of thing. He then made what I regard as the most ingenuous proposition that it has ever been my lot to hear; this proposition was no less than that I should put the real solution in his hands so that he should not give it away. I addressed a few words to him which must have left little or no doubt in his mind as to the view I held of this proposal."

The problem of the prize money had not yet, however, assumed its most terrifying proportions, and he was able to keep Ivy entertained with news of everyday occurrences. Mr. Caldecott, now living in Bloomsbury, had actually come to see

him, and had extended a cautious olive branch in the form of an invitation to visit the British Museum. "Your father came yesterday afternoon quite unexpectedly," he wrote. "He wanted me to cash a cheque for him and he has had a furious row with his landlord . . . He invited me formally to pay a visit to the British Museum which I have promised to do. I think it is my duty to go and I think Papa will tell me a great deal about it which I never knew before. He is an interesting old cove in his sane moments." Also the *Daily Mail* was keeping him busy. He had written a description of Irving's funeral which had been much praised ("I love incense . . .") and another of the opening of the new street, Kingsway, by Edward VII, which he had found less interesting. "I hate those functions; one can only say the same thing every time and, with Charley Hands, I think the King goes about a d—— sight too much and I wish to heaven he would give up processing; one gets very tired of fossicking around after the old cove . . . Thank God I did not have to see him, I did most of the story in the office but after I had got through writing about 'lovely consorts' and 'kingly presences' and 'kindly smiles' I got fed up." Commissions for articles were "pouring in" from weekly magazines, and Alfred Harmsworth, mildly interested by news of revolution in Russia, had asked him to do a sensational descriptive series on the sins of the Tsars. He had been to the funeral of Jim Freeman, where he had rather shocked Clara by appearing in yellow gloves, "until I explained to her that it was a Chinese form of mourning," and he reported the diet which Janet, disapproving of his steady increase in weight, had persuaded him to adopt. He was practising rigid household economy, however, and when he got the chance of a good free meal threw caution to the winds and made the most of it. "I lunched to-day at the Trocadero with Joseph Salmon. I went with an excellent appetite and before lunching I asked him what he was prepared to spend on prog.

He said 'Anything you like,' so I had soup, fish and a bird. The fish was filleted sole Borghese, which knocked him for half a dollar, the bird was pheasant at 4s. 6d. I finished up with a Melba pear, 2s., and a glass of the most glorious brandy, just a thimbleful for 2s. 6d., 1830 Cognac; it tasted really like the nectar of the gods. Also I swiped six very expensive cigarettes and to add to the glory of the day I found a man outside who drove me down to the *Mail* office and thus saved me a penny bus fare." He was still hoping to be able to join Ivy in South Africa for the latter part of her holiday, but, with the prize money and the advertising bills looming menacingly over him, had decided that he could afford to come only if he could persuade a steamship company to give him a free passage. "I cannot tell you for certain until I get my new Tallis Press notepaper," he wrote; "when I have got that I am writing as the Tallis Press to the Union Castle Steamship Co., telling them that 'we are commissioning Mr. Edgar Wallace to write a series of short books on the ideal way of spending a holiday, three or four books dealing with life on board ship,' and all that sort of thing, and asking them to give me a free ticket to Cape Town. Of course, if I do not get it from them I can get it from the Bucknall Line, but I much prefer the Union Castle, still, one is as good as another if it comes to that." However, neither the one nor the other expressed the slightest interest in his proposition, and with the new year the gloom of apprehension descended on him. The book was still selling—had been selling for three months—and still the profits had done little to remove the load of debt which his wild scheme of advertising had contracted. He needed close on £2,000 to extricate himself without even the slenderest margin of profit, and he began to suspect that a 3s. 6d. book which brought in £2,000 for its author was about as common a phenomenon as the phœnix. He began to get frightened. Thousands of readers' solutions, some of them correct, were littering the modest headquarters of the Tallis



Covering Cowes Week as a reporter: 1906.

Press, and readers, as week after week went by without either an announcement or a distribution of prizes, were beginning to write angry letters denouncing *The Four Just Men* as a vulgar swindle. If only Harmsworth had been persuaded to help him! "Alfred has failed me about the *F.J.M.*," he wrote anxiously to Ivy, "and nearly left me in a devil of a hole. If the book had been a failure instead of being a success Alfred's backing out . . . would have ruined me—for a week or two. I do not think I shall ever be ruined for more than a week or two. I think the great thing is to always have something fresh in your mind to go upon." But in spite of the forced optimism of his letters he knew that the situation was all but desperate, and that no fresh ideas would be much use to him unless Harmsworth could be persuaded to advance the money. Already letters were being sent to the *Daily Mail*, in which the book had been so warmly praised and lavishly advertised, enquiring into the *bona fides* of the competition, and Alfred Harmsworth, more concerned for the good name of his newspaper than for the private difficulties of one of its reporters, was irritably coming to the conclusion that for his own sake he had better save the situation.

Meanwhile Ivy, with the child and Susan, had been summoned hurriedly from South Africa, and Edgar, to his intense annoyance, had been sent to Algeciras for the Morocco Conference. "I don't know how things are at the Tallis Press," he wrote plaintively in March, "but I do know that I shall have to see Alfred when I return and 'square yards.'" But the conference dragged on for nearly six weeks, and as soon as it was over he was sent up to Lens to cover the French miners' strikes which had followed the pit disaster at Courrières, and from there to Madrid for the marriage of King Alfonso; from Spain, without an interval, to Norway for King Haakon's coronation, and then south again to Lisbon to enquire into a rumoured plot to assassinate the King of Portugal. After nearly

five months of racing about Europe he began to despair of ever seeing London again, and sent urgent appeals to Alfred Harmsworth to save him from financial disaster. He need not have worried. The suggestion of fraud had come too close to the *Daily Mail* for the great man's liking, and after some delay he telegraphed his willingness to advance the sum of £1,000 (to be deducted in monthly instalments from Edgar's salary) to save him from possible scandal and certain bankruptcy.

The telegram had reached him in Madrid, at a time when his own anxieties had been almost eclipsed by the excitement of the attempted assassination of the King and Queen on their wedding day, and Edgar, whose foresight in making bosom friends with the telegraph operators had been rewarded by the accidental letting through of his messages at a time when the official censorship had closed down on all news of the bomb-throwing, was at first inclined to believe that his employer's generosity had been prompted by this success, though he later came to take a less complacent view of it. Nevertheless, his good luck in being able to send almost hourly dispatches on the day of the outrage did much to strengthen his reputation as a reporter, and in later life became one of the newspaper exploits on which he looked back with most pleasure. On the day before the royal wedding he had spent some hours in studying the interior of the church and writing a careful account of the ceremony, to which unexpected details could be added later. This was his invariable practice with the kind of ceremonial description which depended for its success more on the high-flown quality of its language than on the presentation of facts—since one royal wedding is very much like another, and ceremonies which follow a conventional programme cannot be expected, even by a newspaper, to furnish anything more sensational than a ritual beauty. Edgar, having written the greater part of his account the day before—as full, one may be sure, of "lovely consorts" and "kingly presences" as the opening

of Kingsway—sent off the local correspondent to listen to the actual service, and himself watched for the procession in the Calle Mayor with the intention of adding what are professionally known as "scenes" to his story. For once in his life, on an occasion of this kind, he was not disappointed. Scarcely had the procession passed, and he himself, after following it some little way, turned down a side-street and made his way to the telegraph office to finish his story, than the famous bomb hidden in a bunch of flowers was hurled from an upper window, and the noise of the explosion shook the windows of Madrid. Within a few minutes the news of the outrage had spread like fire through the side-streets, and Edgar fought his way back through the panic-stricken crowds to the Calle Mayor. It was impossible to say exactly what had happened; a bomb had been thrown, the King and Queen were said to be unhurt, and a number of people killed by the explosion, but rumours and counter-rumours swept through the crowd in hysterical succession. Edgar snatched what news he could from those near him, and, incoherent with excitement, made his way back to the telegraph office with the heaven-sent sensation. Alas, the news had travelled through the frantic crowd more rapidly than one sweating Englishman could hope to do, and the wires were already closed to all news of the bomb-throwing. For a breathless five minutes he pleaded with the operator whom only twenty-four hours before he had been magnanimously feasting at the *Daily Mail's* expense at the Café Fornos. He appeared incorruptible. And then Edgar noticed what he had been too distracted to see a moment before—that the friendly Spaniard had unobtrusively pushed in his direction a handful of the little red "urgency" labels which gave diplomatic and other official telegrams immunity and precedence. Grasping the fact that he was being given unofficial assistance, he stuck labels on a sheaf of telegram forms, wrote the startling news in its briefest terms, and dropped them into the basket; while the

obliging operator, like the monkeys in the fable, saw, heard and spoke nothing which was contrary to instructions. A few hours later the abrupt half-column of disjointed cable-ese was in the *Daily Mail* office, and Edgar's breathless description of how he had been very nearly on the scene of the attempted assassination was being set in type while the correspondents of other newspapers were still arguing with the officials in the Madrid telegraph office.

Yes, it was a satisfactory feat to be able to look back on, and when twenty years later he wrote a second account of the experience he was able to consult his memory to even better advantage than he had done in the heat and panic of the actual occasion. "Something made me look up," he wrote. "The windows above both sides of the street were crowded, and, as I raised my eyes, I saw a bunch of flowers hurtling down from an upper window and caught a glimpse of a man's bare hand. The moment I saw those flowers, my heart nearly stopped beating. They were dropping at such a rate that there could be no question that they concealed something heavy, something sinister . . . The force of the explosion almost lifted me off my feet, and in a second I was in the middle of a confused, screaming throng of people, mad with fear. I had a glimpse of dying horses, of blood lying in the roadway, of a half-fainting queen being assisted from the carriage, her white dress splashed with blood. But more vivid still is the impression of the king, as he stood up, an immovable smile on his long face, his fingers waving encouragement to the crowd . . ." Perhaps in 1906 he had not yet realised what magic and malleable material the truth can be in the hands of a story-teller. He must often have cursed the inexperienced haste which had allowed him to telegraph baldly to the *Daily Mail*: "I was writing the last words of a despatch, when from a distant street came what sounded like a solitary explosion. Some ten minutes later a courier came galloping past and brought the terrible news that

a diabolical attempt had been made on the lives of the King and Queen . . ."

But truth is perhaps only a relative matter, and it is a thankless task to examine too closely a born romancer's account of his own adventures. No doubt there remained in his mind a nostalgic affection for the memory of that final exploit, for it was the last of his lucky triumphs as a reporter. The next twelve months were a history of indifferent achievement and sheer bad luck, ending with Edgar's dismissal from the *Daily Mail* in circumstances even more humiliating than had attended his flight from Johannesburg. It was not, however, until the summer of 1907 that he realised how completely his luck had deserted him, and in the meantime continued placidly enough with his newspaper work, never suspecting how soon Sir Alfred Harmsworth would come to the conclusion that both he and the *Daily Mail* could do without him.

From time to time it is considered good business for a newspaper to engage in what is euphemistically described as a "crusade," and in the autumn of 1906 Alfred Harmsworth decided to undertake a Napoleonic campaign against the rising price of soap. This increase in price had been agreed on by the soap manufacturers, following the sudden rise in the cost of raw materials; it had recently been discovered that some of the ingredients of soap could also be converted into margarine and other foodstuffs suitable for the poor, and to balance the consequent rise in the costs of production the soap manufacturers had put up the price of their products. More, at the suggestion of Mr. Lever (later Lord Leverhulme), the Sunlight soap millionaire, they were planning an amalgamation of the principal firms to eliminate the tremendous costs of competitive advertising. Such an amalgamation would, of course, have enormously reduced the advertisement revenue of the newspapers, and rumours immediately spread about that it was part of the scheme to corner all the raw materials available and

substantially increase the price of soap to the public. This latter consideration was, according to the statements of his newspapers, the sole inspiration of the philanthropic Harmsworth scheme to fight the "soap trust" and protect the public, and the poor washerwoman who would be most hardly hit by an increase in soap prices became an object of passionate editorial concern.

The attack on the "soap trust" was launched with all the vigour and thoroughness of which Alfred Harmsworth was capable, and most of the *Daily Mail* reporters, including Edgar, were sooner or later pressed into the fray. A "black list" of all the soap firms involved in the amalgamation scheme was published, with the names of their products, as also a list of firms not so involved, whose products the public was recommended to buy without fear of being instantly strangled by the great soap octopus. Lever Brothers came in for the heaviest punishment, for not only was Mr. Lever the originator of the scheme, but he had also, on the advice of his agents, reduced the weight of the standard bar of Sunlight soap by an ounce, a diplomatic alternative to an increase in retail prices. The attention of the retailer had been expressly called to this reduction in weight by a small label gummed on the end of the soap carton, but the *Daily Mail* fell on the expedient with a yell of outrage which suggested that the "fifteen-ounce pound" was a deliberate attempt to deceive and vampirise the public. In common with other members of the reporting staff it fell to Edgar to supply colourful detail of the suffering caused to the British public by the increased cost of soap, and he was specifically instructed to voice the laments of the poor struggling washerwoman. Accordingly, with great feeling (and, one cannot help suspecting, from the comfort of his study in Elgin Crescent) he contributed to the general *Daily Mail* philippics under the moving heading of "Cruel Blow to the Poor." "Out of the region of high finance," he wrote, "away from the

battleground where an indefinite public fights a very tangible twelve million pound trust, you are nearer to the crux of the whole question when you get to the place where the washing hangs out on the line and the steam and soapy scent of washing day permeates the neighbourhood . . . 'From early Monday morning till late on Saturday night' "—it is an unspecified washerwoman who is speaking—" 'I stand at my wash-tub—and very often well into the early hours of Sunday morning. To meet the competition of the laundries I have reduced my price to 9d. a dozen—and at this price the rise in the price of soap means all the difference between bread-and-butter for my children and dry bread.' " This affecting account was inserted anonymously into the columns set aside daily in the *Daily Mail* for the attack on the soap trust, but it achieved unexpected and somewhat embarrassing prominence when it was quoted in court during the shattering libel action which ultimately followed.

Lever Brothers had borne the assault as long as they could, and then had announced that the amalgamation scheme was to be abandoned. It was an undeniable triumph for the power of the Press, and the Harmsworth newspapers were not slow to drive home to the public the philanthropic magnitude of their achievement. So great was the triumph, indeed, that Harmsworth found himself completely unable to relinquish the subject, and when, a few weeks later, Lever Brothers made an attempt to retrieve the damage by a vast scheme of advertising (not, curiously enough, in the *Daily Mail*) he returned to the attack with open and exuberant scoffing. This sudden resumption of hostilities was too much for Lever. The *Daily Mail* campaign had already had a disastrous effect on the sales of Sunlight soap and the value of Lever shares; he had owned himself beaten, abandoned the trust, and restored the sixteen-ounce pound. More he could not do, and when he found himself and his firm still the victims of hostile publicity he took

legal advice, briefed Sir Edward Carson and F. E. Smith (later Lord Birkenhead) and sued the *Daily Mail* and associated newspapers for libel.

It was a lively case, and with such brilliant counsel it soon became apparent that the Harmsworth crusade to protect the British public was going to be expensive. With masterly succinctness Sir Edward Carson drew up the case for the prosecution. The *Daily Mail*, according to the plaintiffs, had accused Levers of selling soap in a fraudulent manner; they had also claimed that large numbers of employees had been dismissed as a result of the combine. They had, moreover, charged them with cornering the raw materials market, with attempting to bribe the Press, with using unsavoury fish oil in their products, and with pursuing a policy in regard to the combine which "tended to the oppression of the poor." Up to the present, said Sir Edward, the trading losses of the plaintiffs had, as a result of these public accusations, already amounted to £40,000, and two million preference shares had been reduced in value with a loss to shareholders of £200,000.

The charge of oppression of the poor particularly took the ironic fancy of the prosecution, and in the published reports of the proceedings (for the case was being followed by other newspapers with hilarious interest) Edgar's story of the piteous washerwoman occupied a prominent and unenviable place. "Turning," said *The Times* report, "to another article entitled 'Cruel Blow to the Poor,' Sir Edward said it told a story of a poor widow who supported a large family of small children by washing, and who lost 1s. 6d. a week through the increase in the price of soap. She must, said counsel, have used ninety-six 3d. tablets. (Laughter.) They had asked where this poor widow who was using ninety-six tablets a week and was being driven to the pawnshop by Mr. Lever was to be found, and in answer to interrogatories the reply they got was that the story was contributed by a reporter on the staff who

was now in the South of France reporting the wine riots. (Laughter.)"

The defence pleaded in reply that their charges were true, that the conduct of the plaintiffs had been fraudulent and dishonest, and that the articles complained of were fair comment—but the jury thought otherwise. Judgment was given for Lever Brothers, who were awarded £50,000 damages—the largest sum that up to that time had ever been awarded in a libel action. Encouraged by this promising result the lesser soap companies which, with Levers, had borne the brunt of the attack, rushed into litigation, and Mr. Lever's damages having set an opulent example, Sir Alfred Harmsworth found himself finally liable for damages amounting in all to a quarter of a million. It was a crushing blow, even to so rich an organisation as the Harmsworth Press, and a panic of economy swept through Carmelite House. In the course of the anxious conferences and discussions which followed Sir Alfred asked irritably who was the reporter whose ridiculous calculations on the losses of washerwomen had provoked such malicious amusement at the *Daily Mail's* expense. Edgar, returning innocently from Narbonne, where he had, indeed, been covering the wine riots, found a black mark of disfavour registered against him.

But the soap libel was not the only expensive folly in which he was unluckily involved. While the soap war was still in progress he had been sent down to Portsmouth to report a minor naval mutiny, and by omitting to verify one of the statements in his news story (the careful confirming of any dramatic detail was a labour which all his life he found infinitely distasteful) he laid the paper open to yet another libel action, which, though settled out of court and only a tenth as expensive as the Lever Brothers case, was all the more harmful to him since he, and not the *Daily Mail*, was morally responsible.

The Portsmouth outbreak was an unexpected and difficult

incident which, from the newspaper point of view, required careful handling. It had started on a wet Sunday evening, when the men had been mustered for evening quarters in a heavy downpour. Apparently they had some grounds for believing that they might just as well have been assembled in the shelter of the gymnasium, and when the drill was over broke their ranks and ran for cover without waiting for the order to dismiss. They were immediately recalled by the officer in command, Lieutenant B. St. George Collard, and dismissed in a disciplined manner. The signalmen, seamen and marines marched off quietly enough, but the stokers, who appear to have been in an irritable frame of mind, allowed the officer to overhear what the newspapers delicately called "unseemly language." Lieutenant Collard instantly ordered the contingent to muster again, his object being, as the *Daily Mail's* Portsmouth correspondent was careful to make clear, "to give the men, many of whom had recently joined, a lecture on the maintenance of proper discipline. Lieut. Collard," went on the local correspondent, whose duty it was to report the essentials of the story while Edgar wrote fancy accounts of his own impressions, "is a gunnery officer, and it is an old standing practice in the Navy for a gunnery officer when addressing a party of men to order them to kneel upon one knee. The object of so doing is to ensure the officer seeing and being seen by all the men to whom he is speaking. But when Lieut. Collard gave the command 'on the knee' to the stokers, they, not being accustomed to it, thought they were being commanded to kneel to the officer, and every one of them promptly refused to obey. Again the command was given, and gradually, though unwillingly, all the contingent complied, with the exception of one man, who declared he would kneel to God and to nobody else. Lieut. Collard addressed the men and then dismissed them, the man who had refused to kneel being detained to the last.

"It was not anticipated that anything more would be heard of the matter, but about ten o'clock someone in the canteen shouted 'On the knee!' This irritated the stokers—about 300—present, and they began breaking glasses and committing other acts of destruction. Then they made in a body towards the gate, and apparently intended crossing to the officers' quarters and creating a disturbance there. But the alarm had been given, and when the mob reached the gate they found it locked and the guard turned out with fixed bayonets. As the stokers were in a very excited state, and continued to make a great disturbance, the guard was reinforced, and the rioters prevented from doing any further mischief."

Such was the state of affairs when Edgar arrived in Portsmouth, and he proceeded to write around the incident in his usual racy manner, gleaning his material from informal conversations with the men and giving his own opinions of the cause of the outbreak. His sympathies were quite obviously with the men; he remembered well enough what it felt like to be in the ranks, and how quickly resentment could be engendered by any suspicion of bullying. If men, he wrote, were treated "like animals," they would behave as such, and his sympathies allowed him to accept without confirmation a piece of incorrect information about Lieutenant Collard which one of the seamen had given him. "It is a significant fact," he wrote in the *Daily Mail* on November 7th, "that four years ago Lieutenant Collard was involved in a similar case, which resulted in a court of enquiry, and Lieutenant Collard losing six months' seniority." This statement was not only untrue but highly libellous, and Edgar's excuse—that he had sent a telegram, which had been ignored, to the news editor, asking him to confirm it—did not exonerate him from responsibility. Lieutenant Collard was acquitted by court martial of a charge of improper use of the order "on the knee," and immediately turned the attention of his solicitors to the *Daily Mail*, which

lost no time in publishing a full apology. An apology, however, was not enough, and Lieutenant Collard instituted proceedings for libel. Harmsworth, to whom the very word now sounded like a knell, exerted every effort to keep the matter out of court, and while Edgar was sent once more abroad on a complicated assignment the mysterious bickerings of solicitors rose and fell, expensively prolonging the discussion.

Meanwhile Edgar was on his way to a part of Africa which he had never seen—the rubber forests of the Congo. For several years now there had been sinister rumours of the methods by which the Belgian rubber companies—virtual dictators of the Congo Free State ever since that great forest territory, explored by Stanley, had by international agreement been placed under the suzerainty of the King of the Belgians—were working the negro population, and in the winter of 1904 a Commission of Enquiry had been sent to the Congo, largely as a result of missionary agitation and public opinion. The report of the Commission gave considerable support—even after it had passed through King Leopold's hands—to the rumours of widespread and abominable brutality, and the missionaries in the Congo and the reform societies abroad redoubled their agitation for outside, and preferably British, intervention. The story of rubber atrocities was not a new one. Ever since the early 'nineties missionaries and travellers had from time to time brought home tales of wholesale slavery and barbarous punishments, and had hinted at complete terrorisation of the natives for the purpose of sweating the greatest possible yield of rubber out of the Congo. This revenue, it was said, went solely to increase the already immense personal fortune of King Leopold, whose originally philanthropic ideas on the "exploration and civilisation of Africa" had in the course of years been modified into regarding the Congo as a purely personal and highly

profitable property.[1] In 1903 British public opinion had been deeply stirred by the publication of a White Paper containing a report by Roger Casement, then British Consul at Boma, who had made a journey up the Congo River and fully corroborated the charges of maladministration and brutality to the natives. The agitation for Congo reform, however, received little attention from the popular Press until the end of 1906, when E. D. Morel, an authority on Congo affairs and the most active member of the Congo Reform Association, published his sensational book *Red Rubber*, which brought the stories of severed hands and rivers of blood home to the suburbs. Immediately the Liberal Press, true to its policy of giving the fullest publicity to known or suspected scandals of oppression and injustice (and not wholly unconscious, perhaps, of the sensational value of its material), took up the agitation, and day after day the *Daily News* opened on the story, illustrated by blood-curdling photographs of mutilation. The Congo atrocities had at last achieved recognition at the British breakfast table.

This appears to have put the Harmsworth newspapers in something of a quandary. The Congo atrocities were "good stuff," a first-rate titbit of sensational horror; but were they quite so palatable when the hated "cocoa Press"[2] had got more or less of a monopoly? The rivalry between the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily News* was at that time acute, and the idea of playing second fiddle in any sensational agitation can have been very little to Alfred Harmsworth's liking. He may even at that early date have had his suspicions that the Congo

[1] It is amusing to note that the "works of public utility" to which, in 1907, King Leopold was compelled by pressure of Belgian public opinion to promise a part of the Congo revenue, consisted chiefly of schemes for the embellishment of the royal palaces and estates, with a sop to the masses in the shape of an undertaking to convert Ostend into a "bathing city unique in the world." The fact that its three-mile granite promenade is one of the fruits of the Congo rubber scandal is a fact which Ostend very sensibly keeps quiet.

[2] The *Daily News* and the *Star*, owned by the Cadburys and Rowntrees. The offensive nickname was Alfred Harmsworth's retaliation for the equally uncomplimentary "yellow Press" which had been fastened by these rivals on to his own newspapers.

atrocities, if not invented, might at least have been skilfully exaggerated for purposes of anti-Belgian propaganda; more than one European country had cast envious eyes on the profitable Congo Basin, and Germany in particular was jealous of Leopold's possessions in Central Africa. He may also have guessed that the Catholic and therefore pro-Belgian section of the public would be antagonised by a campaign which was bound to throw the greatest discredit on Belgium. At all events, whatever his suspicions or policy, the fact remains that the atrocities in general and Morel's book in particular were given only the slightest mention in the *Daily Mail*, and Edgar (who from his association with a totally different part of Africa was chosen as the most suitable investigator) was sent out to get at the truth of the matter in a more or less confidential capacity.

He left towards the end of 1906, and by January 1907 was already in the Congo. It was a long and tedious journey, beginning with a slow voyage in a Belgian steamer from Antwerp to Matadi, 110 miles up the Congo from the west coast of Africa. From there to Leopoldville was a two days' train journey, followed by ten days on a slow-going river steamer to Lulanga. From this point to Bongandanga (a mission station on the Lapori tributary where Roger Casement had written his report, and which as one of the centres of the "atrocity country" was Edgar's eventual destination) there were only two means of transport—the boats belonging to the rubber companies, and the mission steamer. (There was also a little oil boat called the *Zaïre*, but she did not take passengers.) The Belgian officials were by no means anxious to give facilities to foreign investigators, journalists or otherwise, and his request for a passage to Bongandanga was curtly refused when he made the proviso that he would want to go ashore at missionary as well as government stations. The missionaries, on the other hand, were willing to take him anywhere that their steamer went, and were even eager that he should visit the government

stations and hear both sides of the question. Accordingly it was on the little mission steamer *Livingstone*, with its cannibal crew and its throbbing donkey engine fed on wood chopped nightly by the natives, that he spent the last seven days of the journey through equatorial forest and swamp, passing through country of a lush and sinister strangeness.

The missionaries refused to accept any money for his passage, though they allowed him to pay for his food; and finding himself in the half-forgotten Sunday-school atmosphere which he unconsciously associated with Mr. Caldecott, he was at first inclined to suspect that this generosity was an attempt to prejudice him in the missionaries' favour, and with ostentatious worldliness held himself aloof from their activities. He was, as a matter of course, asked to join in the daily prayers, and the missionary on the *Livingstone*, a somewhat dry Scotsman called MacDonald, climbed up to the top deck, where Edgar was smoking his pipe and gazing down at the crowded lower-deck quarters of the boat's native wood-cutters, for the purpose of inviting him. Edgar, anxious not to commit himself to any partisan act, and also, perhaps, to establish himself as a man of the world, excused himself with some embarrassment. The missionary was unruffled. "Oh, don't feel uncomfortable, Mr. Wallace," he said kindly, "you aren't the only heathen on this boat." This reply upset Edgar's pose of worldly detachment, and from then on he joined in the daily prayers in better humour, attending the services which were invariably held when the steamer touched at a mission station, and even trying his hand at extempore prayer on at least one occasion. By the time he reached Bongandanga his defensive antagonism to the missionaries had gone, and he was frank in his admiration of the way in which they were undertaking the laborious betterment of native conditions as well as the facile conversion of the cannibal heathen.

Bongandanga lies more than a thousand miles inland, in the

heart of the Congo forest. The mission station, a collection of thatched bungalows in a clearing, is built on a high level, from which the almost plain-like tree-tops of the forest stretch in unbroken hundreds of miles beyond the horizon. The missionaries had felled the trees and built the bungalows with their own hands; they grew their own crops, made their own bread, and kept a small farm-yard, for so remote a station was necessarily self-supporting. They were also engaged in the formidable task of translating the Bible into Lomongo, the language of the Mongo and Ngombe tribes among which they worked—a purely spoken language which had never been written until the missionaries transcribed it phonetically into the Roman alphabet—and were patiently setting it up on a small hand printing press. Such an undertaking, for the spiritual education of a people who believed only in ju-jus and devils, who filed their teeth as a proud advertisement of cannibalism and were not particular whether their meat had died of disease or been killed in battle, would have appalled anyone less perfectly convinced of the means of salvation than these Baptist missionaries; but they were making cheerful headway in preaching the Word, and were working on their translations and vocabularies with the zest of scholars.

Edgar was received with pleasure as a guest; visitors were an almost undreamed-of luxury at Bongandanga, and he was made as comfortable as possible in the bungalow of the Rev. H. S. Gamman. Mr. Gamman had supplied evidence of five hundred distinct cases of atrocity to the Commission of Enquiry two years before, and he placed his full report in Edgar's hands. Edgar, nevertheless, though glad of his help, was determined not to accept evidence at second-hand, and interviewed natives and visited their villages with the help of a French-speaking negro whom he had brought to Bongandanga as interpreter. With the help of this interpreter, too, he spent a good deal of his time in pure sightseeing among the villages, for the life of



Edgar, Ivy and Bryan: at Tressillian Crescent.

these primitive tribes, with their feuds and battles, their chiefs and witch-doctors, their childish logic and forest-born superstitions, interested him far more than the political implications of Belgian maladministration. He had heard, on his way to Bongandanga, curious and stirring tales of white commissioners and officials in West Africa, men like Sir Harry Johnston, who had had under their command half-explored native territories as big as any country in Europe; men whose term of office was an endless campaign against tribe warfare and cannibalism and sleeping sickness, and the baffling cunning and beliefs of these strange peoples. His quick imagination responded with eager curiosity to customs and conditions which, he knew, few white men had the opportunity of studying. The Lomongo language, simple and rather poetical, rich in proverb and metaphor, appealed at once to his genuine feeling for words, and he spent long, hot evenings studying the grammar which Mr. Gamman was compiling, asking endless questions and making careful notes of native words and expressions. He had a feeling that this would all be of tremendous use to him some day, though he hardly knew how. At all events it was thrillingly new and immensely interesting, and far more congenial, really, than the laborious enquiry into Belgian atrocities.

In view of what Edgar wrote some twenty years later concerning the Congo atrocities, it is interesting to learn from Mr. Gamman that at the time he expressed himself as being both horrified and convinced by the natives' accounts of official brutality, and by the evidence of atrocities which he saw with his own eyes. It is also illuminating to turn to an article which he wrote in February 1907 at Bongandanga for the *Congo Balolo Mission Record*, a now defunct little magazine which the missionaries were producing on the field, and in which he speaks of the "oppression and neglect" of the natives, and of "unimagined cruelties." "Frankly," he wrote, "I do not regard the native as my brother or my sister, nor even as my first

cousin; nor is he even a poor relation. I do not love the native—nor do I hate him. To me he is just a part of the scenery, a picturesque object with uses." Yet, having established this unimpeachable empire-building attitude, he was bound to add: "Already the Congo is to me as a dreadful nightmare, a bad dream of death and suffering. Such a dream as one sees o' nights when nothing is right, when every law of man and nature is revolted, and the very laws of life are outraged . . . In another place, and in other columns than these, I shall take upon myself the journalist's privilege of prejudging posterity's verdict." Yet this "bad dream of death and suffering" is curiously out of key with the few paragraphs with which, twenty years later, he dismissed his Congo experience. "The basis of the charge against the Congo Government," he wrote in 1926, "was that its officials were guilty of innumerable atrocities on the natives, and undoubtedly crimes of mutilation and of a similar character had been committed by native soldiers in the employ of the Congo Government. There was missionary support for these stories, but, beyond question, there was bad blood between the British missionaries and the Belgian officials, and we regarded the missionary angle with a little scepticism. . . . But I saw no evidence of atrocities which were not fourteen years old. Germany coveted the Congo, and I am perfectly satisfied in my mind that, in so far as Morel was concerned, he was a propaganda agent working on behalf of the German Foreign Office."

What Edgar reported in confidence to Sir Alfred Harmsworth may now never be known, but the fact remains that he wrote no articles on the Congo for the *Daily Mail*, or, if he wrote them, that they were never published. The version of the affair which he gave, a few weeks after his return to England, to Mr. Gamman's father, to whom he carried messages from Bongandanga, was that he had been sent to the Congo to obtain information discrediting the atrocity stories; that he had seen

horrifying evidence of atrocities with his own eyes and had said so in his articles, which had been suppressed; and that as a result of his refusal to pervert the truth he had been cast forth with ignominy from the doors of Carmelite House.

Whatever truth there may have been in this story, the last part, at least, was deliberately untrue, though one can hardly blame him for concealing from Mr. Gamman's father the less noble details of his humiliating dismissal. What had really happened was that Lieutenant Collard, still smarting under Edgar's libellous mistake, had had to be soothed by a settlement out of court of £5,000, and a further public and undeniably abject apology; and Alfred Harmsworth, in whom the very mention of the word "libel" now produced powerful symptoms of despairing nausea, had decided that Edgar's "graceful pen" was an expensive luxury which the *Daily Mail* could cheerfully, even thankfully, do without.

CHAPTER III

"Sanders Of The River"

IF the break with the *Rand Daily Mail* had seemed a catastrophe, it was nothing, now, to this acrimonious parting. For the second time Edgar found the ground cut from under his feet, and this latest fall was more painful than the first. There was no fresh field to turn to where the humiliation of his dismissal would be unknown; already the story had been greeted with raised eyebrows and suppressed smiles in every bar and newspaper office in the Street. Neither was the cause of it a more or less dignified disagreement with a newspaper proprietor, but a reporter's carelessness which had cost thousands. The word went round that he was a dangerous and unreliable writer. Of all reputations this is the most damaging to a journalist, and Edgar was dismayed to find that nobody cared to take the risk of employing him. He had been involved in two libel actions, the last of which had cost the *Daily Mail* £5,000; it was also rumoured that he had sailed perilously near the wind with *The Four Just Men*, and had had to be rescued financially by the Chief. His newspaper associates were sympathetic but unhelpful. What was the good of giving work to a man who made nothing but trouble? He had great talent, it was true, and had had some sensational successes, but was this talent worth hiring when it concealed such dangerous possibilities? Considering these things, editors who a few months before would have been glad of his services now briskly regretted that they had nothing to offer, and Edgar, incredulous at first, found soon enough that every door in Fleet Street was closed against him.

It was a particularly unfortunate time for his luck to desert him, for now, more than ever before, he needed money. The wreckage of *The Four Just Men* had still to be cleared, Ivy was expecting another child, and his creditors both in England and South Africa had mysteriously got wind of his altered circumstances and were clamouring for payment. No. 37 Elgin Crescent became less a home than a place where bills and threats were delivered by every post, where every ring at the bell might mean the serving of a summons, and where bailiffs made themselves offensively comfortable in the kitchen. Gradually, too, the house was denuded of its few valuables. Edgar's watch and chain, always good for £12, were among the first sacrifices, quickly followed by the *Daily Mail* presentation casket, Ivy's Honiton lace shawl, the diamond engagement ring which Dr. Jameson had given to Mrs. Caldecott's younger sister before the Raid, and all Ivy's trinkets. The grocer had put in a bailiff whose tobacco permeated the house, and the milkman was threatening proceedings for £70. Ivy, with a frightening coal bill on her conscience, protested faintly against the extravagance of fires, and it became obvious that as soon as her confinement was over they would have to move to a smaller house in a more economical neighbourhood. This they did early in 1908 when the new baby, christened Patricia Marion Caldecott, was only a few months old; but except that the garden of No. 6 Tressillian Crescent, Brockley, had a back gate through which Edgar escaped when callers at the front door looked ominous, the move brought few material advantages.

Edgar had been partly influenced in his choice of a district by a sudden nostalgia for the scenes of his boyhood, and by an inquisitive desire to renew acquaintance with Edie Cockle. He was beginning to admit even to himself that he and Ivy were temperamentally ill-matched, and in this period of anxiety a nervous tension developed between them which

prosperity might less readily have uncovered. The constant worry made Edgar gloomy and irritable, and Ivy, unable to summon an artificial gaiety, became silent and nervous, and at the first sign of a quarrel took refuge in tears. She was even unhappier than he, having less experience of insolvency and less resilience, and her gentle nature had none of the hard, capable cheerfulness which Edgar found reassuring and attractive in other women. Worn down by anxiety, she began to lose even her unsophisticated pride in her own appearance, and Edgar, resentfully feeling that his home at least should have been a place of unfailing cheerfulness and charm, found in her subdued nervousness a new annoyance. In this worried and dissatisfied frame of mind his thoughts seem to have turned regretfully to the image of Edie—Edie as he remembered her, warm and affectionate and perennially youthful; and he confided to more than one friend that he could never love another woman as he had loved her. Edie, however, was happily married to a seafaring man and had children of her own, and, despite the fact that he had moved to Brockley chiefly to be near her, received his visits in a polite and reserved spirit. She admired Bryan and Pat when he took them to see her, and showed him her own boys, but she prudently surrounded herself with an aura of formality, so that his old love fell back once more into the position which it had occupied in his imagination for so many years, symbol of an idealised emotion, half-regretted and never wholly forgotten. Still, in an odd way it was comforting to be in a part of London which he had known so long, and he carried Bryan and Pat to Blackheath and Hilly Fields, and gazed at the places he had loved as a boy. It was consoling, too, to see Clara again, and pour his troubles into her willing ear. Fleet Street might be deaf to him and creditors hostile, but to faithful Clara (now married again and supporting an ease-loving husband by office cleaning) he was still her Dick, and therefore a genius, and

wonderful. She listened to his worries with sympathetic clucks of indignation and surprise, and came willingly to Tressillian Crescent to help with the scrubbing.

It took months to convince him that his luck was really out, but when week after week went by with no prospect of work, and his desk became cluttered with rejected articles and stories, he fell gradually into a lethargy of deepening depression, and for the first time entertained the suspicion that he was really finished. He became superstitious, snatching anxiously at any omen which seemed significant of promise. He insisted on working by the light of an orange-shaded lamp, since a bazaar fortune-teller had once told him that the colour was lucky; gave Janet his tie to carry to a suburban palmist, and was annoyed when she reported that the soothsayer had warned her never to trust the owner of it with money; resorted frequently to the old expedient of "turning a key" in the Bible, searching for some text which might give him comfort and encouragement, and on one occasion at least drew reassurance from this old wives' oracle. He had come home, discouraged and exhausted, to find Janet in the house, and had flung himself down with the despairing announcement that his ideas were gone, that he was written out, finished. Janet, to divert him, found him a Bible and a key, advising him to read his fortune by the old method. The book was opened at random, the key dropped on the page and turned three times, and brought to rest on the twenty-fourth chapter of Ezekiel. "Thus saith the Lord God, Set on a pot, set it on, and also pour water into it . . . make it boil well . . ." Startled by this unmistakable advice to keep the pot boiling he went immediately to his desk and waited for inspiration; but no matter how he flogged his brain it seemed that the old readiness of invention and confidence of approach had been driven out of him.

Yet through all this long period of depression he regarded any pinching and saving as a confession of defeat. With coal

bills lying unopened on his desk he would throw coal, and still more coal on the study fire. "*Of course* we can't afford it," he would answer Ivy, "but if I wait to have what I can afford I shall never have anything." And acting on this belief, on those now rare occasions when a story or an article had been accepted, he would refuse to pay the household bills with the money, and would take the bold chance of doubling his profits at the races. Racing, which had always attracted his gambler's spirit more strongly than any of the less certain methods of losing money, now violently took possession of his hopes, and Ivy despaired to see his erratic earnings squandered so lightly. But to Edgar the race-course now even more persuasively than before held out the perennial promise of easy money; occasional winnings blotted out losses from his memory, and confirmed in him the punter's mysterious enthusiasm which is the heaven-sent manna of the bookmaker.

Soon after his dismissal from Carmelite House he had introduced into his household a cheerful little window-cleaner by the name of Cassidy, and had made him his personal assistant and general factotum. He had originally been coaxed in from the window-sill by Ivy, who, liking his spruce appearance and intelligent face, had asked him if he would like to do odd jobs for an extra few shillings, and Edgar had found him so useful that he had been promoted to a vaguely confidential position somewhere between errand boy and valet. Now, in the two lean years which followed his sudden downfall from the *Mail*, Edgar was finding Cassidy invaluable. He brushed and pressed his clothes (since the poorer one was, the more immaculate one had to appear), ran his errands, interviewed the tradesmen whom Ivy no longer had the courage to face, and appeared in his stead in the County Court in answer to summonses. He was a faithful servant and a faithful friend, and acted, as far as he could, as a buffer between Edgar and misfortune. It was Cassidy who held the door with polite smiles and

non-committal phrases while Edgar escaped by the garden gate and Ivy peered apprehensively from behind the curtains; Cassidy who went down to Fleet Street with stories and articles, proudly arrayed in a cast-off South African hat, and bargained firmly for immediate cash payment. It was to Cassidy that the children ran when they cut their knees, and Cassidy with whom Edgar, well out of Ivy's disapproving hearing, could console himself with the technical study of racing. He had the added charm, too, of being infinitely sympathetic: if the money for his small wage were not forthcoming he said nothing about it, and Edgar rewarded his patience with cast-off clothing and the gift of a golden sovereign whenever he heard (which was not infrequently) of a new addition to Cassidy's growing family. On only one occasion did they come near quarrelling, and that was when Ivy, now painfully accustomed to parting with their possessions, had sold the greater part of Edgar's wardrobe, including his grey Ascot coat, to a passing dealer for the sum of twenty-six shillings, and Cassidy had obediently carried them down to the barrow. The loss of his clothes brought home to Edgar as nothing else had done the humiliation of his poverty, and he reproached Cassidy bitterly. It was to Cassidy, moreover, that Ivy sometimes confided her fears, for in these two melancholy years, when nothing went right and all hope seemed exhausted, Edgar's depression at times reached a pitch which terrified her. The old glib threat of suicide was now perhaps no more likely to be put into execution than it had been in the past, but it produced a constant nightmare of apprehension in Ivy, and after consultation with Cassidy she took the bold step of emptying and hiding his revolver. Since Edgar never quite got to the length of looking for it, it was never missed, and remained in the same hiding-place for years, an uneasy and unnecessary weight on his wife's conscience.

During all this time, between hope and despair, Edgar had been forcing himself to write, and if the grudging trickle of

money which his efforts brought in had done no more than keep him tottering on the edge of bankruptcy, at least his name had not altogether faded from the memory of Fleet Street, and by the end of 1909 his fortunes took a sudden upward turn. Having no newspaper office which he could call his own he had haunted the Press Club (as many in his predicament have done before and since) in the constant hope of making useful contacts. Four years before, in the security of his position on the *Daily Mail*, he had written to Ivy: "I do not care for the Press Club very much, such a rotten class of people go there"; but by this time he was glad of the casual companionship of the card room, and now, when even his train fare from Brockley meant a hysterical search through the house for undiscovered pennies, his persistence was suddenly rewarded. He had had an introduction to George Beech, the manager of Shurey's Publications, who had doubtfully commissioned one or two racing articles, and had finally sent him on to the fiction editor, Mrs. Thorne, with the request that she would see "a chap called Wallace." This meeting with Isabel Thorne was a momentous one, though Edgar did not realise it at the time, and sat meekly waiting in her office while she quickly read through the two short stories which he had hoped to sell to one of her magazines—either *Yes & No*, which specialised in crime and mystery, or the *Weekly Tale-Teller*, a modest short-story magazine published at a penny. Mrs. Thorne skimmed through his stories with professional speed, and briskly proceeded to tell him what was the matter with them. One of them, she pointed out, was no good at all, and the other, for which she was prepared to pay a few guineas for *Yes & No*, was less a short story than a well-written incident. Discouraged by her frank criticism, yet anxious to get what value he could from the interview, he asked her to give him a candid opinion of his chances as a writer. He was the author, he reminded her, of *The Four Just Men*, on which he had lost money; his *Smithy* sketches had been popular

for a long time, and he was continuing the series for *Ideas*, though he felt that the scope of them was limited. In the last two years he had written four more novels—*The Council of Justice* (a sequel to *The Four Just Men*), *Angel Esquire*, a fanciful racing story called *Captain Tatham of Tatham Island*, and a humorous, quasi-romantic tale of middle-class intrigue called *The Duke in the Suburbs*. All of these, he told Mrs. Thorne, had done passably well, but, since he had sold each of them outright for £70 or £80, had made little profit, and the public had shown no overwhelming desire to acclaim him as a popular author. The short story, he felt certain, was a surer stepping-stone to fortune; yet what was the secret of success in that incalculable market? He had made many attempts, and none of them had been lucky; the drawers of his desk were crammed with rejected manuscripts. Nevertheless he felt sure that if only he could hit on the formula the short story was almost certainly his medium. What advice, out of all her vast experience, could Mrs. Thorne offer? For nearly an hour they discussed the technique of short-story writing and the palate of the public. Mrs. Thorne, for her part, running economical magazines on rather short rations, was anxious to encourage him; she was not allowed to pay the big prices demanded by well-established authors, and her life as an editor was a perpetual search for new and consequently inexpensive talent. She gave him an explicit lecture on what a short story for the *Weekly Tale-Teller* ought to be, and he left her office looking subdued and thoughtful.

A few evenings later Mrs. Thorne hurried out of Hind Court into Fleet Street and jumped on a bus for London Bridge Station, where she was catching a train. Climbing to the top she took the first vacant seat, and found herself next to a carefully dressed man in a large felt hat who bade her good evening in a level voice and reminded her that he was Edgar Wallace. He was going, he told her, to an East End meeting of the Congo

Reform Association, and conversationally told her some of the things he had seen in the rubber country. In particular he touched on the stories that were told of Sir Harry Johnston and other commissioners in West Africa; tales he had heard up and down the coast and even one or two that he remembered from the Caldecotts' dinner-table. "But, good heavens!" cried Mrs. Thorne, "why are you worrying about good material for short stories? You've got everything there—colour, excitement, an exotic background and some wonderful characters! Why on earth don't you utilise your knowledge and write me some African stories for the *Weekly Tale-Teller*?" Edgar was so powerfully struck with this suggestion that he forgot to change buses at the Bank, and instead went on with Mrs. Thorne to London Bridge. There they walked up and down the platform, arguing, questioning and planning, and Mrs. Thorne's train was allowed to go, and several of its successors, before they could relinquish the discussion of an idea which seemed to both of them little short of an inspiration. It was not until he was home in Tressillian Crescent that Edgar remembered that he was supposed to be taking the chair at the Congo meeting. It was too late now, and he dismissed the idea without regret. Already his mind was busy with the character and adventures of Mr. Commissioner Sanders.

For the next few days he thought of nothing else. The Congo notes which he had made three years before were searched out and eagerly studied—the tribes, the customs, the roundabout proverbial speech, the fragments of the Lomongo tongue which he had copied from Mr. Gamman's vocabulary. Of course! Here was an inexhaustible fund of material ready to his hand, and nothing remained but to clarify and elaborate his characters. The river need not be specifically the Congo, since his hero must be an Englishman, and an empire-builder if possible into the bargain; no, an unspecified native territory in West Africa was best—impossible to identify on any map, yet

containing all the romantic dangers of the Congo country. "After all," as he later made Lieutenant Bones reflect, "the great river was very far from the ken of book reviewers, and the land and its people were little known." Who was to say what was fact and what was fiction? The Lomongo tongue, which he had studied superficially at Bongandanga, could be easily transposed into "Bomongo," and his list of native words, worked sparingly into the text, would be convincing and impressive. He would have a residency in his fictitious territory, and it should not lie inland, like Boma, but on the coast, at the mouth of the mysterious river which flowed through crocodile-infested swamps and illimitable forest. The tribes themselves, Mongo and Ngombe, could be utilised with little or no disguise, for who was to say whether or not they inhabited his territory? And the gunboat of the residency should be called the *Zaïre* (the old name for the Congo) like the oil-boat which the missionary steamer had passed on her way to Bongandanga. Rapidly his characters began to take shape in his imagination. Mr. Commissioner Sanders should be his hero—a mixture of Harry Johnston and the other West African commissioners of whom he had heard such romantic and blood-curdling tales; a strong, silent man who spoke the Bomongo tongue to perfection and was little short of a king in the river territories; an administrator of resource and action, who was not afraid to take the law into his own hands, and was consequently loved and feared by his cannibal peoples. From there, having established a population, a commissioner and a residency, it was a short step to adding a body of native troops and calling them Houssas; to giving them, moreover, a Captain Hamilton, a minor character who would be a good foil to Sanders. The next day he went back to Mrs. Thorne's office and displayed his suggestions. She received them with enthusiasm, and together they discussed the outlines of the first few stories. The first six or eight were each minutely discussed in this way

before they were written, and in the course of these conversations a further character was evolved—a native chief who was both a great man and a great rascal, an endearing, artful, Autolycus kind of person, not above a little thieving and sharp practice, but nevertheless a loyal British subject and a true follower of Sanders. They searched the map thoughtfully for a good name for this character, and found a valuable suggestion in the River Bosombo. The *Weekly Tale-Teller* proudly announced a new and specially written series of West African stories under the collective title of *Sanders of the River*.

The stories were an immediate success, and the *Weekly Tale-Teller's* readers wrote the kind of letters which editors love to receive. Edgar was flatteringly invited to contribute a short sketch of his life to the magazine's series of "Popular Tale-Tellers," and composed one with relish, from which his readers learned the surprising news that he had been wounded in the South African war, and had also travelled extensively in India and China. A second series, the *People of the River*, was planned and written, and Edgar, now well into his stride and thoroughly enjoying himself, began to realise that he had tapped a source which need never be exhausted. Sanders and Bosambo had become real people, and his readers were experiencing all the interest and suspense which is at once the inspiration and the spur of serial writers. He realised, too, that these stories were the best work he had ever done, and that at last he was mastering the difficult technique of the short story. He evolved a favourite pattern and fitted the adventures of his characters to the neat design. He would outline a chain of incidents to a certain point, break off, and begin an apparently independent story; then another, and another; at the crucial point the several threads would meet and become one, and the tale would end swiftly, tied in a neat knot of either comedy or drama. He fortified his imagination with books on African tribes, their manners and folk-lore, and when the facts were

insufficiently picturesque he glibly invented them. It was immense fun, once one had got the hang of it, to refer knowledgeably to mysterious beliefs and superstitions which one had thought of on the way home, to drop poetic "native" phrases into the dialogue, and even, when he felt mischievous, to underline their authenticity with pompous footnotes. It was amusing, too, to put scraps of his own opinions into the mouths of cannibals, and have sly digs at the people he knew in the course of the narrative. "It is an axiom," he would write philosophically, "that the hour brings its man——" and then, thinking wryly of the Brockley tradesmen, "—most assuredly it brings its creditor." Or again: "Arachi was a most convincing man, possessing the powers of all great borrowers, and he convinced his father-in-law—a relation who, from the beginning of time, has always been the least open to conviction." A nice poke in the ribs for Mr. Caldecott.

At the end of the first two series Mrs. Thorne suggested the introduction of a new character—a new hero, in fact, to take his turn at carrying the main interest, with Sanders temporarily relegated to the background. "What about Hamilton, the Captain of the Houssas?" she asked, and they discussed a possible series with Hamilton as hero. But the next day Edgar was back with a better suggestion. "Hamilton's no good," he said. "Don't you see, he's another of these strong, silent men, no contrast to Sanders? What I've done is to invent another character, a boy just out from England, Lieutenant Tibbetts, nicknamed Bones . . ." Thus was one of his most permanently popular and successful characters born—an elaboration of the monocled "silly ass" so dear to humorists, and later brought to the full flower of perfection by P. G. Wodehouse; a bungler who sometimes emerges triumphant from a dangerous situation, a figure of fun who is at the same time full of courage and all the popular stirling qualities of the British officer, a conceited idiot who exasperates his superiors and is yet pathetically endearing

to the reader, a confident half-wit and atrocious speller who wastes his money on correspondence courses and is always involved in grandiose schemes which never, save accidentally, come to anything. He was the perfect foil for Sanders and Bosambo, and, in his own right, an ideal vehicle for Edgar's neat, cheerful, rather boyish humour. He was almost more to the taste of his readers than Sanders himself, and when, after his first run in the *Weekly Tale-Teller*, *Bones* was published in book form, he was handsomely dedicated "to Isabel Thorne, who was largely responsible for bringing Sanders into being." "It is no extravagant statement to make," Edgar wrote on the fly-leaf of Mrs. Thorne's own copy, "that but for you this book and other Sanders books would not have been written. It is with all the greater pleasure therefore that I dedicate this book to you who have been not only a friend but a part creator of Sanders and Bosambo."

It really seemed, at last, as if the spell were broken. He was rapidly making a new reputation as a popular short-story writer, and, as usually happens, one success was quick to attract others. His *Smithy* sketches had taken a new lease of life in *Ideas*, Edward Hulton's penny weekly, and he had promoted Smithy's imaginary pal, Nobby Clark, to a position of equal importance. *Ideas* seemed willing to take as many of these readable trivialities as he was able to write, and, since the formula was now so familiar that he could write them almost without thinking, there was no reason why he should not go on producing them indefinitely. On one occasion, indeed, the current instalment had for some reason been forgotten, and the editor of *Ideas* had rung up in a panic for Edgar's copy. "It's on its way down," said Edgar resourcefully; "you'll have it within an hour"; and within an hour the hastily written sketch was on its way to the office in a taxi, accompanied by Cassidy.

Added to this, he had had a tentative offer of a job from Charles Watney, an old *Daily Mail* colleague who had become



Leading in the winner of the *Edgar Wallace Handicap*: Agua Caliente.

news-editor of the *Standard*, a solid morning paper of which the *Evening Standard* in those days was a by-product; and before long was taken on the staff as a reporter. He was frankly delighted to be back in Fleet Street again, and pleased to be working under H. A. Gwynne, the old chief of his Reuters days, who was now editor of the *Standard;* he flung himself into the restless routine of the reporters' room with something like enthusiasm. It was even a pleasure to be following King Edward about again, and he reported his funeral in the same rolling phrases which had served him so well in his *Daily Mail* description of Irving's funeral years before, and which he assumed (somewhat rashly) that everyone would by this time have forgotten. It was even more delightful to do Ascot for the paper, with a new grey morning coat and all expenses paid, and he accepted his substantial winnings on Gold Cup day as a happy omen. In the last two years racing had been almost too precarious to be pleasant; winners had been desperately necessary and losses a disaster; but now, with a steady salary to fall back on and all his lost confidence restored, he was able to bet in the old careless and patrician manner. He was never, in the narrow sense of the phrase, a "real racing man." He had none of the patience and caution of the backer who makes racing a profession, and even calculates his profit; he had no deep knowledge of horse-flesh (though his vanity flattered him on this point) and his betting was directed less by system than by fancy. The most irresponsible whisper of "inside knowledge" found him a willing listener, for he had faith in his own intuition as well as his luck, and this faith, supported by hours of fascinated poring over *Racing Up To Date* and the sporting papers, gradually assumed in his imagination the guise of an experienced and scientific knowledge. He was the typical punter, making his daily bets in the spirit in which another man might turn to a narcotic, and as happy at home with a racing paper as on the course. He was not, in these early days at least, particularly interested in the

spectacle of the race. Betting was his excitement, his drug; the pleasant stimulant which filled every afternoon with suspense and every morning with opportunity. He had gambled with life, and it was not unnatural that he should gamble for pleasure, and in the long run he had no greater and no less luck than most remorseless gamblers. Losses could be forgotten by the simple process of burying one's head in the sand of an accommodating memory, and spectacular winnings were just frequent enough to support his undaunted faith in his own luck and to silence the quiet but persistent disapproval of Ivy. His vanity, too, was fed by that mysterious self-esteem which flatters the imagination of the race-goer; that feeling of importance and power which exudes from the first-class carriages of race specials like a perceptible odour, and makes a man love to be recognised in the paddock. As he grew older and more prosperous this aura of racing vanity enveloped him like a mantle, but even in the days when he had little to spend, and his daily selections were a matter of conference with Cassidy, it had a powerful hold on him.

It was about this time that, emotionally at a loose end, he began to fall in love with a woman who for more than ten years was to be significant in his life, and who for the purposes of this biography may as well be called Daisy. She was a few years younger than Edgar himself—an attractive woman in her early thirties, and he found in her all the easy sociability and liveliness of spirit which charmed him in women. She was gay where Ivy was reserved, worldly where she was timid, and she had the quick intelligence and tolerant humour which are the essence of good company. Daisy was not pretty, but she had a sophisticated air, and she shared his appetite for race-going and the theatre. She possessed, moreover, a genial temperament and an easy kindness, and the warmth of attraction between them was quick and mutual. It had long been Edgar's habit to confide his superficial flirtations to Ivy, and even to bring home the

charmer of the moment for her inspection, and he saw no reason why he should not introduce Daisy as a new friend for the family; but Ivy was not slow to see that this ripening acquaintance contained the seeds of a sympathy and compatibility which she and Edgar had never really approached, and received Daisy sadly. It seemed unlikely, now, that he would ever return to the emotional closeness of the first years of their marriage; he was friendly still, and affectionate in a detached way, but his charm and his eager spirits were now all for Daisy. She seemed to have usurped unconsciously even those willing offices which Ivy had undertaken with such pride —reading his manuscripts, correcting his proofs, discussing the plots of his stories. It was now Daisy who went up to the study in the evening, her face glowing and her arms full of papers, while Ivy sat by herself in the drawing-room, playing the piano softly to herself, or reading. She had none of Ivy's stay-at-home shyness, and apparently had endless leisure and inclination for going about: if the entertainment were no more than taking Pat and Bryan to the pantomime Daisy entered into it with spirit, and would return blithely to the meal which Ivy had prepared, and spend the evening in Tressillian Crescent without misgiving. Edgar seems deliberately to have ignored Ivy's unspoken jealousy, for he took no pains to conceal the fact that his thoughts were occupied exclusively with his new love; he had an extraordinary capacity for shutting the eyes of his mind to what he did not choose to see, and he certainly had no desire to see Ivy suffer. So the situation was smoothed over by certain conventional assumptions—that Ivy did not care for going out, and that it was useful for him to have someone to help him with his work—and then, being to his way of thinking sufficiently explained, it was placidly ignored. Daisy herself, if she had any reason for dissatisfaction, did not show it. She lunched with Edgar, went to the races with him, and spent afternoons on the river; and on special occasions accompanied him to the theatre

in an elegant evening gown with a little train, so that people who did not know Ivy remarked approvingly that they were a well-matched couple. Certainly she was an admirable companion, and was not the only person to assume too easily that Ivy was indifferent.

Towards the end of 1910 the new and ambitious *Evening Times* made its appearance in Fleet Street, together with *The Week-End*, a penny weekly which hoped to combine the attractions of the respectable reviews with those of more popular and commonplace weekly journals. A group of Edgar's old Carmelite House associates had planned and launched both papers, and before they had been running many weeks he was invited on to the staff of *The Week-End* as racing editor, and, soon after, as racing editor and special writer to the *Evening Times*. The planning of the new ventures was principally the work of Charles Watney, who had been news-editor and foreign editor of the *Daily Mail* during Edgar's time; John Cowley, the *Mail's* general manager, had gone over as general director, and Arthur C. Findon as advertisement manager, while the news-editor was Bernard Falk, a resourceful and irrepressible Lancashire journalist whom Edgar had known as a reporter on the *Evening News*, and who had sunk all his savings into *The Week-End* in the rash hope of turning them into a fortune. Both papers were under-financed to a degree which would preclude any possibility of their existence to-day, but they were full of hope and possessed some originality, and showed an amazing courage in facing the hostile competition of the *Evening News* and the other six evening papers with which the pre-war London public was already burdened.

Edgar attacked his new job with vigour. He fancied himself extremely as a racing prophet, and was delighted to be able to occupy himself almost exclusively with this fascinating pastime. For the first few months, indeed, his success as a tipster was surprising, and *The Week-End*, which had started out with more

ambitious pretensions, became chiefly known for the excellence of its racing feature. When after a few more months of precarious existence it showed signs of becoming too heavy a liability on the *Evening Times*, Edgar's suggestion that it should be turned into a racing paper seemed a practical one; *The Week-End* regretfully abandoned its more intelligent features, and with Edgar as shareholding editor embarked on a sporting career as *The Week-End Racing Supplement*. While editing this he still continued as racing editor and star reporter of the *Evening Times*, and with the help of Cassidy, whom he had introduced into the office as a sporting sub-editor, invented several original racing features. As "Nick o' Lincoln" he made an entertaining analysis of racing form and tried to pick certainties, as "Clever Mike" he offered tips concealed in a facetious cartoon, and as "R. E. Walton" guaranteed to readers who sent him half a crown an envelope containing the name of a two-to-one winner. So much prophecy would have exhausted a man of less confidence and vitality, but Edgar throve, and became so puffed up with his racing successes (for tips which are failures can be tactfully ignored, while winners are triumphantly featured and stick in the memory) that he began seriously to consider giving up story-writing and making racing journalism his entire occupation. Fired with this idea, he started two independent racing sheets of his own, *Bibury's* and *R. E. Walton's Weekly*, staffed by himself, Cassidy and a boy, and issued economically from a room in Thavies Inn. He had visions of turning bookmaker as well, being reluctant to leave any profitable stone unturned. Hypnotised as always by the idea of easy money he even risked a gamble in the patent medicine market, joining one of his friends in the launching of a magical "rheumatic pad" which had no medicinal properties whatsoever, and was deservedly a failure. Nor was this by any means the sum of his activities. With the help of Albert de Courville, whom he had known as a reckless young reporter on the *Evening News* and

who had now gone into the theatrical business and was making money, he was trying his hand at revue and music-hall sketches, and one or two had been produced and had been moderately successful. *The Manager's Dream*, a short sketch for three characters, had been included in the variety programme at the Chelsea Palace, and a comic telephone sketch, *Hello, Exchange!* had even gone into a revue in a West-End theatre. Believing that Edgar had an undeveloped gift for the popular theatre, and wishing, moreover, to help him financially (since they had been friendly in the Carmelite House days, and had found each other congenial when they met in Lens following the Courrières disaster), de Courville was encouraging him to write for the Hippodrome revues in which he had a hand, and even buying sketches and lyrics which he knew were unusable—partly out of kindness and partly for the sake of developing a gift which he suspected might one day become profitable.

With so many irons in the fire (and the Sanders stories were at the same time appearing in almost unbroken sequence in the *Weekly Tale-Teller*) it is not surprising that Edgar's interest in *The Week-End Racing Supplement* and the *Evening Times* began to flag, and that he left more and more of the drudgery to his associates. He still loved the racing pages, and appeared punctually in the office at seven o'clock each morning to begin work on the early sporting edition of the *Evening Times* which was his special responsibility, and was always amenable to spreading himself on a big story like King George's coronation (which he wrote the day before), the Sidney Street siege or the Crippen murder; but the routine drudgery of editorship frankly bored him, and criticism from his colleagues too often ended in a quarrel. By this time he had had enough experience as a journalist and had developed a sufficiently high opinion of his own judgment to be a difficult man to advise; so long as he was praised and left to his own devices he was happy and tractable, and even showed glimpses of inventive genius; but criticism he

resented; it made him obstinate; and as he was not the only temperamental and touchy member of the *Evening Times* staff the office was occasionally rocked by quarrels of ridiculous proportions.

Nevertheless the *Evening Times* was becoming a popular paper, and was paying its way in the face of much rivalry and opposition. Such profits as it made were (largely on Edgar's advice) immediately spent on schemes of improvement instead of being saved; but even so it might have survived for many years if it had not been for the unlucky incident of the Crippen confession, and the sudden withdrawal of the greater part of the paper's financial backing.

Few criminal cases have excited a more avid curiosity than the trial of Dr. Crippen for the murder of his wife, Belle Elmore. It appeared to be that rare thing in English criminal history, a *crime passionnel*, and it had, beside the sexual aspect, all those elements of physical horror which so pleasantly divert the popular fancy. The trial had been followed in breathless detail by all the newspapers, and in the weeks following Crippen's conviction and the failure of his appeal the possibility of a last-minute confession kept the news-rooms uneasy. A few days before November 23rd, 1910, which was the date fixed for the execution, a man called at the *Evening Times* office and asked to see the editor. He was reticent and evasive in manner, but finally, under urgent promises of secrecy, confided to Bernard Falk that Crippen had made a confession to his solicitor, Mr. Arthur Newton, and that the said Mr. Newton was willing to consider selling the confession to the *Evening Times* for £1,000. This possibility, if it were genuine, seemed almost too good to be true, and it was agreed that Arthur Findon should immediately interview the solicitor and discuss terms. It was privately decided that £1,000 was too high a price, even for a new paper anxious to increase its circulation, and Findon was authorised to offer a maximum of £500—an offer which the

solicitor accepted without much argument. The confession, he explained, was not a written document signed by Crippen, but had been made verbally by his client during his imprisonment, and was embodied in the notes taken by himself, Newton, at the time. For the sum of £500 he was prepared to dictate a full statement from those notes, to be published on the day of the execution, provided only that his own name were in no way connected with it. Several interviews took place between Findon and Newton at the Langham Hotel, and Newton, who had stipulated payment in cash, received the full sum in sovereigns and promised to dictate the confession on the evening of the 22nd, in good time for the *Evening Times* to publish the story in its first edition on the 23rd, which would appear on the streets only an hour or two after Crippen's execution. On the strength of this payment and promise the *Evening Times* put out posters all over London announcing the confession, and Findon went to keep what was to have been his final interview with the solicitor. To his dismay he was confronted by a nervous man who in the last few hours had violently changed his mind. He believed that the Law Society had got wind of his intentions, and in sudden panic had decided to go back on his promise. He regretted that he could go no farther in the matter. This was a serious dilemma for the *Evening Times*, which had already startled London with its announcements, and was receiving frantic orders from the newsagents; and as a last resort it presented Newton with an ultimatum—that unless the confession were delivered to them, as agreed, they would publish the whole story of the solicitor's offer, together with the fact that he had already accepted £500 as payment for the confession. Terrified now by the possible professional consequences to himself, whichever way he acted, Newton finally in the small hours of the morning promised to dictate the confession to a friend, who in turn undertook to deliver it at Arthur Findon's flat within a few hours.

Accordingly, at about three o'clock in the morning, the anonymous friend arrived with the written narrative, which he refused to allow out of his hands; he would dictate it, he said, and then only on the understanding that Newton was not to be quoted as an authority, and that the original document was to be burned as soon as read. Findon and another member of the *Evening Times* staff took it down from his dictation, and in some anguish watched him throw the original copy on the fire. The partially burned remains of it they rescued as soon as he had gone, to serve as some sort of evidence of the authenticity of the confession.

At five o'clock on the morning of the 23rd the confession was in the office, where most of the editorial staff, including Edgar, were anxiously expecting it. It was not, perhaps, as hair-raising as they had hoped, but at least it contained the definite statement that Crippen had intentionally poisoned his wife by administering two doses of hyoscine in indigestion tablets, and had dismembered the body with a surgeon's knife which he had afterwards hidden in the garden of an empty house in Hilldrop Crescent. The material was good enough, at all events, to justify the *Evening Times* posters of the night before, and Edgar (who had nursed a particular affection for the murderer since learning from Captain Kendall's statement that Crippen, during the Atlantic crossing which had ended in his arrest, had been "busy reading *The Four Just Men*, which is all about a murder . . .") was told by Charles Watney, the editor, to improve it still further with "half a column of good human intro."

This half column Edgar wrote with some zest, and since time was short and the printers were already clamouring for copy, neither he nor anyone else noticed a sentence which crept into the introduction and which was to do the *Evening Times* incalculable harm. "The statement printed below," he wrote, "is Crippen's own statement. It bears in every line the stamp of

authenticity. It is unnecessary to say that no journal—even the least responsible of journals—would print this confession of Crippen's without unimpeachable authority. *That authority we possess.*" Had this claim been omitted it is possible that no one could successfully have challenged the *Evening Times* "confession"; it was written in the third person, ostensibly by "a friend," who "unable to hold his awful secret any longer" had "given the full facts to the *Evening Times.*" Presented solely on this anonymous authority it might, indeed, have been suspect, and the half-burned statement in the handwriting of a friend of the solicitor might not have been accepted as responsible proof, but at least no one could have questioned the "unimpeachable authority" which Edgar claimed, and which, since Newton afterwards denied having had anything to do with the confession, could not be produced. However, nobody noticed the trap which Edgar had unconsciously constructed, and as soon as it was on the streets the *Evening Times* began to sell as it had never done before. Up to this time the paper had had a circulation of about 100,000—a respectable enough figure, considering that there were then more than twice the number of London evening papers that there are to-day—but on the day of the Crippen confession 200,000 copies had been sold by one o'clock, and by the end of the day the sales were close on a million. It appeared at first to be an overwhelming triumph, but the other newspapers meanwhile had not been idle; they had applied both to Newton and to the governor and warders of Pentonville for confirmation of the "confession," and had received emphatic and official denials from all of them. The *Evening News* and *Star* flooded the streets with bills announcing: "CRIPPEN: NO CONFESSION," and the *Evening Times*, when challenged to produce its proofs, was miserably dumb. The best corroboration which it could elicit even from Newton was that in his view it "was not within any man's right to throw doubt on the confession." "So far as I personally am con-

cerned," said Mr. Newton cautiously to reporters, "I can say nothing about the confession. I personally knew of no confession, but beyond this I cannot discuss the matter." For want of any better support the *Evening Times* was thoroughly discredited, and by the next day its sales had dropped ominously to 60,000. An anxious conference was called and legal advice taken. The solicitor consulted unhesitatingly advised the directors to publish the whole story, making clear Newton's part in the affair and the fact that he had offered, and been paid for, an authentic confession compiled from his own notes of Crippen's statements; but Sir Samuel Scott, one of the members of Parliament financing the paper, was against taking such a step, it being his opinion that while the *Evening Times* would eventually live the matter down such an exposure would inevitably ruin Newton.

Living down this apparent fraud on the public, however, was no easy matter, and it was months before the *Evening Times* circulation could be coaxed back to even half what it had been before the Crippen incident. The staff racked its brains for stunts and competitions, and did everything in its power to attract the public. Edgar devised one of the more amusing contests, in which a "mammoth panto-cake" was awarded to the most popular principal boy in London—the candidates being voted for by their admirers, and each vote, of course, having to be registered on a special coupon cut from the *Evening Times*. The pantomime principal boy was still, in 1911, an immensely popular figure, and there was a sufficient number of pantomimes running to make the competition a keen one. "No matter how far down your nominee is on the list," the voters were encouraged, "SHE CAN WIN IF YOU GET BUSY!"—by the simple means, needless to say, of buying scores of copies of the *Evening Times* and voting a hundred times over. The panto-cake (supplied free of charge by an enterprising confectioner) was exhibited in a shop window in the Strand,

and readers were told that "those who have not yet seen this mammoth pastry should take an early opportunity of doing so." The mammoth pastry was finally awarded to Miss Ethel Hall, the strapping Robinson Crusoe at the Elephant and Castle, who topped the poll with 35,896 votes, and Edgar appeared, together with Robinson Crusoe and a seven-tier cake, on the Elephant Theatre stage after the performance. The theatre was packed with Miss Hall's ardent supporters, and the whole audience, as the *Evening Times* described it, "was agog." Edgar made a pleasant speech, presented Miss Hall with an inscribed silver cake-knife, and playfully invited her to put the cake in her pocket—a witticism which, in view of the scantiness of Robinson Crusoe's attire, was received as the very cream of daring irony, and brought the pleasing ceremony to an end with "loud and prolonged cheers."

With the help of this and other popular schemes the *Evening Times*, which by now had developed into an excellent evening paper, was creeping steadily back into public favour when it suffered two disastrous financial set-backs of a kind which no newspaper, without substantial capital to draw on, could have survived. The financial responsibility of the *Evening Times* had from the beginning been chiefly borne by Captain J. A. Morrison, then M.P. for East Nottingham, who had put a small part of his fortune into the venture and had promised a great deal more. At the beginning of 1912, however, it became clear that the paper was showing only a lean margin of profit, and that with a struggle, and Captain Morrison, who went to Canada at this time, suddenly withdrew his support. Without his backing the paper, which so far had led a solvent but completely hand-to-mouth existence, had nothing to stand on, and the frantic search for new capital was unavailing. The original company was forced into liquidation, costs were cut to the bone, the staff agreed to work for almost nothing (Edgar's salary was reduced to £3 a week) and with amazing coolness

John Cowley undertook to keep the paper afloat with his own money. Such a measure was, of course, intended only as a stop-gap, to tide over the bad time until new financial backing could be found; but no support offered itself, and the rest of Fleet Street, watching the approaching crash with charmed interest, guessed that the unequal struggle could not last much longer. It is just possible that if all had gone well at that time with the advertising world the crash might have been avoided, or at least postponed, but as ill-luck would have it an unexpected coal strike unnerved the advertisers, and in one week six hundred pounds' worth of advertising contracts was suspended. An adequately financed paper could have survived the blow, but the *Evening Times* depended on its advertising revenue to pay its weekly bills, and the situation became desperate. A second frantic search was made for new supporters. The paper was offered indirectly to the Conservative Party, which was not interested; to Lord Beaverbrook, who was considering the purchase of the *Evening Standard;* and to Alfred Harmsworth, who had now become Lord Northcliffe, and who unkindly replied that if he bought the paper his sole purpose would be to kill it, and that as it was obviously breathing its last he saw no earthly reason for wasting his money. By April the whole of Cowley's personal resources had been exhausted, Edgar's shares were worthless, and Falk's and Watney's savings had gone with the rest. It became evident that the paper had got to be put out of its misery, and on the 25th of April, with a net sale of 103,000, the machines were brought to a standstill. John Cowley admits that he shed tears over this collapse of his hopes and the ruin of his fortune, and if the others did not weep with him it was not that they felt any less despondent. They had no means of telling, then, that their fortunes would mend; that Cowley would become chairman of the *Daily Mirror* Company and a rich man again, that Falk would have many successful years as editor of the *Sunday Dispatch*, or that Edgar would find

in his own inventive brain an inexhaustible treasure. At the time it seemed, to them, like the end of the world, and even Edgar can have got little philosophic comfort out of the reflection that with the death of *The Week-End*, which necessarily followed that of the *Evening Times*, his third responsible editorship had collapsed under him.

He was, indeed, more than a little disheartened. At thirty-seven, after more than twelve years of journalism, Fleet Street had let him down again, as carelessly and completely as if he had been a beginner. The *Evening Times* was dead, he was out of work, and no other newspaper seemed eager to employ him. True, his little racing sheets still kept up a struggle for existence, but they were almost more trouble than they were worth, and their profits barely cancelled out their losses;[1] his enthusiasm for them had dwindled to a mild interest, and he was content to leave most of the work to Cassidy. He began to see Fleet Street now in a less glamorous light, as a place in which only the fortunate or the unenterprising kept a permanent footing, and where good work was forgotten almost before the ink which printed it had dried. When, a few months later, the Macedonian war broke out and Charlie Hands, Bennet Burleigh and others once more assumed the importance of war correspondents, while he had nothing more exciting to do than post the weekly instalment of *Sanders* from Tressillian Crescent, he voiced his vague disappointment in the *Press Club Bulletin*, a facetious little periodical which has long since ceased to exist. "Somebody asked me if I did not feel a pang at seeing all my old

[1] Mr. B. M. Hansard, the publisher of *Bibury's Weekly*, gives the following account of the sudden death of Wallace's racing sheet: "Calling at the office, he [Wallace] asked me 'How much was in the till,' and on mentioning the figure, he said, 'Draw it out—I will go to Newmarket and bring back a couple of thousand pounds. I have got a cast-iron certainty, and here are the horses you can send out during the week, except on Wednesday, when I will wire you.' Hiring a Daimler car, and taking a lady friend with him, he repaired to Newmarket, and on the Saturday morning, when he was due to return, I found a letter on my desk, which read, 'Dear Hansard, Shut the business up, it's no damned good.'" (*In and Out of Fleet Street*, by B. M. Hansard, 1925.)

pals careering wildly across the plains of Thrace. I said 'No,' but as it wasn't the first lie I had told that day it did not hurt me much to tell it. . . . I console myself," he hastened to add, "with the fact that I have had three offers to go to the front which I have had to refuse," and then went on, with surprising bitterness for a man who to the end of his life preserved a strange nostalgia for Fleet Street, "journalism is a rotten profession in many ways, it knows only one cry, and that cry 'Give.' You must give of your best on a Monday, slave, sweat, earn the mumbled thanks of a busy editor as you meet him in the passage (you on your way to hard labour, he *en route* for the Carlton) and strive—for what? For forgetfulness on Tuesday. Your *magnum opus*—if you will pardon the expression—is waste-paper by Wednesday. Your achievement of Monday does not excuse your failure on Thursday. All you have done is forgotten, past, done with."

Yet he was not so badly off, after all. Money was short, but that was nothing new, and he had plenty of work on hand. His West African stories had opened an inexhaustible market for him in the magazines, and he had several new novels in progress which were absorbing his attention. Some time before he had sold the rights of the ill-fated *Four Just Men* to Newnes for £75, and was both pleased and annoyed by the rate at which it was selling. The profits which he felt should have been his were going to the publishers, but at least it proved that his work was acceptable to a very wide public, even without any fanfare of advertising, and he set to work to turn several story ideas into full-length novels. He had been much struck during the Algeciras Conference six years before by the possibility of a conflagration between England and Germany, and he had worked out the imaginary course of such a war in *Private Selby*, beginning with a surprise invasion of England, and filling in the details of his hero's surprising adventures from recollections of his own life in the army. Now he was occupied

with two mystery stories, *The Fourth Plague* and *The River of Stars*, and with a racing novel, *Grey Timothy*, all three of which he was preparing to sell outright to Ward, Lock and Company.

Now that he was no longer tied to a newspaper office his work at home developed a routine of its own round which the life of the whole household revolved. His first-floor study at the back of the house, overlooking the garden, was regarded as sacred, and no one, not even Daisy, was admitted without invitation. The children, now nine and six years old, knew to tiptoe with caution past the door and to keep their voices low when they played in the garden. As he worked often before breakfast, and usually for the rest of the day as well, the cleaning of the room was something of a problem; the carpet-sweeper would be propped patiently outside his door, waiting its opportunity, and very often the scratch of his pen or the drone of his voice dictating in measured sentences into the new dictaphone would go on for the whole day with scarcely an interruption. The dictaphone had effectually solved the problem of part-time secretaries. The successors to Mr. Wood had been many and tiresome, and he found he could dictate even better when there was nobody listening. By means of the machine, too, he was able to indulge the physical laziness which had increased with the years, and which made the sheer effort of writing a distasteful burden. He smoked incessantly as he worked, and the heavy pipe of his South African days had been replaced by an almost more continuous cigarette habit. To keep the smoke out of his eyes he had recently adopted the precaution of using a holder, and, extravagant in this as in every detail of comfort, was having them made in dozens by a favourite tobacconist. In a particularly intense creative spell he would work away from home, for Albert de Courville (who by this time was making a fortune and had gone to live in the more sympathetic surroundings of the Ritz) had passed on to Edgar the lease of his flat in Clarence Gate Gardens, near

Baker Street, which was a pleasant *pied-à-terre*, conveniently remote from the distractions of the family. It was an expensive luxury, for the flat was a large one, but he valued the freedom it gave him and saw no reason why he should not indulge himself while he could afford it. The expense, perhaps, was not entirely justified by the results, but, as he had so often pointed out, if he waited until he could afford things he would never have them—a point of view he maintained to the end of his life. He had, besides, recently perfected an ingenious method of increasing the commercial value of his writing. This idea, which was not a new one (the prolific George R. Sims was reputed to have brought it to a fine art), consisted of slipping concealed advertisements into his stories. Roughly, the way in which the scheme operated was this: suppose, for the sake of illustration, that an exterminating powder existed by the name of Insectox, the manufacturers of which were willing to pay good money for skilful publicity. Edgar would have a private discussion with the makers, and then would write a magazine mystery story in which the most important clue to the murder would be a torn and blood-stained packet with the letters INSE discernible on the wrapper. The police would busy themselves with this important clue, on which the reader's interest would be anxiously centred, and which would eventually unravel the mystery when the other half of the packet was, at the end of the story, dramatically discovered. The detectives, of course, would know that the second fragment matched the first, which had been found, let us say, near the body of the murdered man, because the letters CTOX on the second piece would complete the name of a well-known household necessity. The handcuffs would be triumphantly clapped on the murderer's wrists and the name Insectox would insidiously haunt the mind of the reading public. Naturally enough, Edgar kept this arrangement to himself, but he explained the trick to a few intimates, since it amused him. "I get £25 for a story like that," he

would say, indicating his name on the cover of a magazine, "but——" pointing to some ingenious clue in the text, "*that* happens to be worth £200."

In March, 1913, Edward Hulton, the Manchester newspaper proprietor who was trying hard to become a second Northcliffe, suddenly appointed Edgar editor-in-chief of *Ideas* and *The Story Journal*. *Ideas* at that time was being produced in the Hulton office in Withy Grove, Manchester, and to be made editor of it was regarded by Hulton's employees (since the magazine had had nineteen successive editors in seven years) as tantamount to being handed a bowl of hemlock. A. E. Wilson, now dramatic critic of the *Star* and an authority on the Victorian toy theatre, was the nineteenth editor at the time of Edgar's appointment, and received him in Manchester with some surprise, since only three months before Hulton had abruptly commanded him to clear all the old contributors, including Edgar Wallace, off the paper. Hulton, however, was an unpredictable man, and it now appeared that this same old contributor was to be installed over Wilson's head, and that the editorial office was to be moved to London, to a basement in Temple Chambers which became irreverently known to the staff as "the underground lavatory." Here Edgar set to work to improve the paper, and in the first burst of magnificent energy which always characterised his attack on a new job, worked fourteen hours a day for £10 a week. He wrote editorials, serials, sketches and articles, and invented an apparently inexhaustible series of new features which occasionally pleased and more often dissatisfied Hulton. Hulton was never an easy man to work for. Uncouth, dour, brutal and suspicious, he was a curious person to find running publications ostensibly devoted to popular lightheartedness and humour. One of the trials to which the staff and sometimes the editor had to submit was the formal reading aloud to Hulton of the weekly joke page; at the climax of each witticism he would give the reader a hostile stare and observe

crushingly: "I see nothing funny in *that*." He was violent in his criticisms, and undoubtedly enjoyed making his employees writhe. Edgar, whose armour of self-conceit had done little to cure his exaggerated sensitiveness where his work was concerned, was sometimes seen to come out of Hulton's office white and shaking. Why a man of that type should have possessed such power to wound him is a mystery; his self-confidence, which unfailingly raised him up after every failure, was not proof against brutal criticism and contempt, which were Hulton's favourite weapons. The thirst for approbation which made him grateful even for an office boy's praise made working for Hulton a difficult and galling experience.

After a few months his original enthusiasm began, as usual, to dwindle, and gradually the weight of editorship was shifted back on to the capable shoulders of A. E. Wilson. Edgar came into the office less frequently, and employed his time there largely in serials and articles for other papers, and with composing lyrics and sketches for de Courville. Absorbed in his many activities and pressed for time, he became careless, and the results of his carelessness came to Hulton's notice. He was writing at the time a serialised life story of Evelyn Thaw, who had recently come to England, for the *Daily Sketch*, one of Hulton's newspapers, and being one day short of an instalment and not having time to approach Evelyn Thaw for more material, had torn an old article of his own from *Ideas*, and had worked it, almost word for word, into the serial. The article in question had been an interview with a black-and-white artist, and dealt mainly with his philosophy of life and views on art. In the mouth of a chorus girl these considered opinions had a somewhat incongruous ring, and an observant reader sent in the two articles side by side, without comment. Startled by this mysterious repetition, Hulton began to enquire into Edgar's activities, and discovered among other things that the typist whom Edgar employed on the Hulton pay-roll was busy from

morning to night typing revue sketches, short stories, serials, articles and racing advice which had nothing whatever to do with Hulton publications. It was more than enough. Edgar had already survived for several months longer than most editors of *Ideas*, and Hulton was itching for a change. If he had needed a legitimate opportunity Edgar had placed one in his hands, and he was not slow to use it. A. E. Wilson was abused and reinstalled. Edgar was abused and given notice. Thrown out of his fourth editorship, but this time not unwillingly, he left Hulton and the "underground lavatory" without regret.

CHAPTER IV

Hail and Farewell

IN the summer of 1913, some months before the break with Hulton, Edgar had felt sufficiently well-established to take Ivy and the children for a holiday in Belgium. He chose Westende, an unattractive seaside resort with safe bathing which Daisy had recommended, and took rooms in a quiet hotel where he could work in peace while Ivy looked after the children. It pleased him to be able to take them abroad, even if no further than across the Channel, for he was anxious that the children should speak French (they already had a French governess) and should grow up—especially Pat—graced with every kind of upper-class accomplishment. Pat was an engaging child, fair and blue-eyed, and in feature absurdly like him, and from her earliest infancy had held an unrivalled place in her father's affections. Emotionally drawn to children as he was, and able to inspire their immediate trust, he was also of the temperament which loves to create favourites, and as far as his own children were concerned was never able to maintain impartiality. Bryan as a baby had been the centre of his interests, and rather spoilt, but with the advent of Pat, Edgar discovered that a golden-haired little girl is more attractive than a shy and leggy boy, and had transferred his fond indulgence to his daughter. Both had their ups and downs, and Bryan would sometimes be in favour for a time and Pat ignored, but such capricious reversals were rare, and seldom lasted.

The holiday at Westende had been a period of glorious freedom for the children, and a great success. Ivy had regained

a little of her lost serenity, and had begun to hope that if only she and Edgar could be alone once more, a little less divided by his work and by more dangerous distractions, all might yet be well. He was fond of her still, she was sure, and knew that her feeling for him was what it had always been. Surely, even if at times he found her a trifle dull, preferring to go out with women who shone more easily than she, surely the basis of affection remained unshaken? It was no use trying after all these years to turn herself into another kind of person. Dick had loved her shyness and unworldliness once; was it too much to hope that her quiet devotion, patient and unspectacular though it was, might in the end outweigh more dazzling advantages? She had been distressed recently by a slight deafness which was growing more noticeable, and which she feared; the deaf, she knew, were cut off from much of the easy intercourse of life, became of necessity solitary and self-absorbed. She was ashamed of this disability and concealed it as best she might, forcing herself to talk, striving after a liveliness quite foreign to her nature in an attempt to realise the fragile promise of revived happiness. If only she and Dick could be alone together, contented and self-sufficient, and away from Daisy! Cautiously, when the time came for returning to London, she suggested that they might come to Belgium again, perhaps in August . . . ? But by the following August Belgium had ceased to be a place where one went for holidays, and Daisy, as much excited by the war as Edgar himself, came blithely and often to Tressillian Crescent.

In the spring of that year Edgar, busy with serial-writing, had had an offer of a job on *Town Topics*, a pink-coloured sporting weekly which was a tolerable imitation of the *Sporting Times*, and which advertised itself as "the man's paper." Though Ivy might disapprove of its jokes (the dirtiest always helpfully outlined in black on the front page, like a memorial card), there was much in *Town Topics* to appeal to Edgar, and before he had been many weeks on the staff his influence was apparent on

every page. Founded and edited by Arthur M. Binstead ("Pitcher"), a journalist with some reputation as a wit, the paper was primarily devoted to racing interests, supported by theatrical and general gossip. It catered exclusively for what were supposed to be the preoccupations of the man about town, and even boasted a gastronomic correspondent, Lieutenant-Colonel Newnham Davis, who gloatingly analysed the menus of the West-End restaurants. Once established, and filling the paper with racing news, gossip, articles, poems and the everlasting *Smithy*, Edgar found as many jobs as possible for his friends. Cassidy was introduced as a sub-editor, Mrs. Cora Lawrence (a capable journalist who had been in charge of the woman's page on the *Evening Times*, and who remained a friend for many years) was brought in to preside over the theatre section, and her good-looking young son, Vincent, for whom Edgar had an affection, was initiated into the mysterious craft of gossip-writing.

The outbreak of war had a disastrous effect on the sporting and theatrical interests which supported the paper, and salaries were drastically reduced. "London is at war, it seems," Edgar wrote. "I have not heard 'All the winners!' cried for I don't know how long. Cassidy came to me with a cheerful face on Wednesday. 'I'm for it,' he said briefly. He had been called to his regiment (he is a Section D reservist), and I am manless." Vincent Lawrence, barely old enough to enlist, was the next to go, and in the war fever of the first few months the staff was quickly depleted. At thirty-nine Edgar himself was above military age, but he lost no time in turning *Town Topics* into a highly war-conscious paper, bristling with sentimental patriotism and snorting verses. If he could not be a war correspondent, at least he could write a daily rouser to put beef into the troops, and in the Tudor Street office he kept up a running fire of front-page rhymes in the facile vein of the war poems written in South Africa. His uncritical capacity for

accepting the popular attitude was never more apparent; from the moment when war was declared every German became for him a Hun, a "decadent ape," a "beast without bowels or brain,"[1] and our brave boys at the front (of whom *Smithy*, staunch veteran, was now naturally one) were heroes to a man. The unspeakable pro-Boer had been replaced by the unspeakable pacifist. He would have regarded it as unpatriotic[2] to take any other view, and, since this was the outlook required by a war-excited public, *Town Topics* soon recovered from its temporary depression. "Edgar Wallace," wrote Arnold Bennett in 1928, "has a very grave defect, and I will not hide it. He is content with society as it is. He parades no subversive opinions. He is 'correct.' " This was a shrewd observation, and was never more plainly demonstrated than by Edgar's newspaper work during the war. It was not that he feared to cross swords with public opinion; he always, most fully and sincerely, shared it. Reforms,[3] social agitations and unpopular causes did not interest him; more—he opposed them instinctively, with a strong consciousness of moral justification. This is a psychological factor of some importance in the consideration of his later phenomenal success as a popular writer, and cannot be ignored even in 1914, when he turned his energies with such wholesale sincerity towards the glorification of war. "You don't know how pleased I am," he wrote to Vincent Lawrence, when the

[1] "What of that tortured and mangled Louvain,
The work of a decadent ape?
What of the beasts without bowels or brain
That you loosed to their orgy of rape?
Hate us—we like it: from Things in your shape."
(*A Ballad of Hate to Wilhelm II*, by Edgar Wallace, *Town Topics*, Nov. 7th, 1914.)

[2] Wallace's ideas of what constituted patriotism were royalist and imperial. In 1911 he wrote in the *Empire Magazine* suggesting the appointment of the King's sons as Viceroys and the establishment of a colonial peerage. "I would do more than appoint Royal Governors . . . I would appoint a vassal King of Australia, a King of South Africa, a King of Canada. I would crystallise patriotism."

[3] The only reform which he ever undertook (and, characteristically, accomplished) was in the Rules of Racing in 1928. (See page 333.)



Ivy: 1913.



Pat and Bryan: 1913.



Edgar in 1914.

boy had been promoted in the line, " . . . between Captain Vincent Lawrence and Master Vincent Lawrence there stretches an immeasurable gulf . . . I do not know what your career will be after the war, whether you will remain in the army or whether you will return to mufti, but in the latter case you bring a testimonial to your merits far greater than any you could have secured in the humdrum days of peace." When the boy reached his majority Edgar telegraphed: "CONGRATULATE YOU MY DEAR LAD ON ATTAINING YOUR 21ST BIRTHDAY IN THE NOBLEST PROFESSION IN THE WORLD."

Undoubtedly he would have liked to represent some great newspaper at the front, but Kitchener's old ban had not been lifted, and he had to be content with writing about the war from a safe distance. He was delighted when Sir Charles Hyde, the proprietor of the *Birmingham Daily Post*, appointed him military correspondent—a job which entailed writing a daily column summarising the war news and expressing spirited opinions—and enjoyed the sensation of participation in the war which the appointment gave him. He wrote the column late at night when his work for *Town Topics* (of which, soon after the death of Arthur Binstead, he had become managing editor)[1] was finished, waiting until the last possible moment for late war

[1] One of Wallace's more endearing characteristics was that he never assumed superiority, least of all when he found himself in a position of authority or influence. Thus, as managing editor of *Town Topics* he wrote personal and encouraging letters to new contributors, and was not above a joke at his own expense. "I can pay you a guinea for this," he wrote to one hopeful contributor; "it is worth more, but unfortunately we are not." To Miss Blanche Wills Chandler, then (to him) a completely unknown contributor, he wrote in his own careful handwriting in 1916:

"DEAR MISS CHANDLER,

"I like your stuff and I am using it. Tell me, how are you circumstanced? (That sounds like an Income Tax enquiry!) Are you starting your literary career or are you well launched?—I don't find you in 'Who's Who.' There isn't much opening on *Town Topics* but I might help you elsewhere. Don't think me impertinent—I just want to 'help along' if I can. Just now I am pretty busy . . . so that I haven't a great deal of time for giving advice which with the best intentions in the world may be impertinent, but if you will own up I may be able to put you in the way of work, for your stuff has a good touch . . ."

news on which he could offer comment to the Midlands. For these six daily articles he appears to have been paid twelve guineas a week, which, at the rate of two guineas a column, was a modest enough salary; but newspaper salaries before and during the war were on an unpretentious scale, and Edgar never earned, as a salaried member of a newspaper staff, more than the original fifteen guineas a week which he had been paid by the *Daily Mail*.[1] His *Birmingham Post* articles, which began on the second day of the war and continued in unbroken sequence until the armistice, were a kind of work which he did extremely well. They were as accurate as it was possible for any work of his to be, they were pungently written, and possessed the quality of being comprehensible to the uninformed civilian, which is more than can be said of much of the war-time journalism of the heavier newspapers. He treated the censorship none too respectfully, and his optimistic prophecies were popular; readers of the *Birmingham Post* wrote to him in hundreds, praising his courageous outlook and crediting him with "having done much to keep the Midlands in good heart"; and even so prominent a soldier as General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien wrote to him twice from Gibraltar, criticising the behaviour of a certain field-marshal with passionate indiscretion.

At the beginning of the war, however, the weekly twelve guineas[2] from the *Birmingham Post* were almost as important to him as the prestige of being its military correspondent. His

[1] This does not, of course, include individually commissioned articles, for which in his latter years he was able to command fairly high figures.

[2] "To the best of my knowledge, I believe that Edgar's income during the first five years that I was with him was considerably less than £50 a week. William Blackwood . . . paid him fifty shillings per thousand words for serials. The daily articles in the *Birmingham Post* fetched another twelve guineas a week. From all other sources his weekly earnings averaged perhaps an additional twenty guineas. . . . So it is reasonable to say that in the period under consideration (1915–1920) Edgar's annual income was less than £2,500. . . . Including the service flat, Edgar was regularly maintaining three separate establishments for at least eight months out of every twelve." (*Edgar Wallace*, by His Wife. Hutchinson, 1932.)

Town Topics salary was a modest one, serials brought in an average of only £250 apiece, and he was still (chiefly, one suspects, because he was always too hard-up to wait for royalties) selling the book rights to Ward, Lock & Company for a down payment of less than £100. His small contributions to de Courville's war-time revues at the Hippodrome (*Hullo, Ragtime!*, *Hullo, Tango!*, *Business as Usual*, etc.) supplemented these earnings from time to time, and he was pouring out cheap paper-backed books on war themes[1] for Newnes and other publishers, and writing, besides, a Smithy-type series of sketches for America, called *Tam o' the Scouts;* but his living expenses had risen alarmingly, and each month there were increasingly heavy bills for rent and wages. In the autumn of 1914, when every Channel boat was bringing its cargo of Belgian refugees into England, he had leased a fair-sized furnished house in Brockley, and had offered it to the manager of the Westende hotel where he and Ivy had stayed, as a refuge for his friends and numerous family. A few months later he had moved Ivy, the two children, their governess and a servant to Clarence Gate Gardens, which up to that time had been his own retreat, and not wishing to be deprived of independence had taken a service flat for himself in Yeoman House, Haymarket. Added to this there was a bungalow at Alfriston, which he rented in the summer, and where Ivy and the children and one or other of the Belgian refugees spent long holidays.

This load of responsibility made it necessary for him to undertake even more work than before, and the burden brought with it a growing train of typists and secretaries. Early in the war he had depended for his typing on an employee of the Dictaphone Company, a young man called Robert Curtis, an amazingly fast and accurate typist whom he had persuaded to give up his

[1] *Standard History of the War*, Newnes, 1914; *Famous Scottish Regiments*, 1914; *Field-Marshal Sir John French and his Campaigns*, 1914; *Heroes All: Gallant Deeds of the War*, Newnes, 1914; *Kitchener's Army and the Territorial Forces*, Newnes, 1915; 1925: *The Story of a Fatal Peace*, Newnes, 1915.

job to work for him privately. Curtis was a secretary very much to his taste. He was a prodigious worker, calm, rapid and reliable, and he had no objection to working all night as well as all day if Edgar were in the throes of an overdue serial. But eventually Curtis had joined up and gone to the war, and Edgar found himself in urgent need of a secretary.

In answer to his advertisement there appeared one night at his flat in Yeoman House a grey-eyed, freckled girl of eighteen who introduced herself as Miss Violet King, produced credentials from Clark's Secretarial College, which she had recently left, and assured him of her ability as a typist. She was shy and a little nervous, and obviously, with her dark hair bundled up under a veiled and ugly hat, trying to appear much older than she was; and in her confusion made the initial mistake of confessing that she had never heard of Edgar Wallace. "I was sorry the moment the words were out of my mouth," she admitted after his death seventeen years later. "He made me see so plainly that he was hurt. He took it for granted—even then—that his name was a household word."[1] But in spite of her tactlessness the girl pleased him, and instead of discussing salary or her recommendations as a secretary he began to talk to her about himself. His wife, one learns with some surprise from this same memoir of the interview, "was an invalid"—which "seemed a pity." He showed her snapshots of his children, and called her attention to the stacks of his own books which littered the flat. At the end of a pleasant conversation which had lasted for more than two hours, and in which there had been no mention of either work or wages, Miss King was told to report for work at nine o'clock the following morning. A new and vital relationship—perhaps the most important that Edgar ever had with any woman—friendly, passionate, jealous and business-like in turn, had unobtrusively begun.

[1] *Edgar Wallace*, by His Wife. Hutchinson, 1932. This memoir was written in collaboration with Mr. Haydon Talbot, the American journalist, from material supplied by Mrs. Wallace.

It is not easy, remembering her in the latter years of her life (she was only thirty-six when she died in 1933), cool, well-dressed, shrewd and perfectly self-assured, to reconstruct the awkward girl of 1915, and realise that the gawky figure is her own. Although she was to become Edgar's second wife, replacing Ivy and defeating the more experienced Daisy on her own ground, her attraction at that time was by no means obvious. Her eyes were fine, and she had a healthy mop of dark, untidy hair, but the repose of her mouth was spoiled by slightly prominent teeth, and her legs (though this was not noticeable under the long war-time skirts) were decidedly bowed. Several years later Edgar celebrated this first meeting in the familiar doggerel with which he amused his children.

"It's very necessary
I should have a secretary,
And one night there came to me
This same girl who seemed to be
Very competent and handy
(She was also slightly bandy).
She wore ear-rings and a veil
And was thinner than a rail.
Well, to cut the story short,
As she seemed a jolly sort
I engaged her on the spot.
Soon on friendly terms we got."

It is not an altogether prepossessing picture, but Violet King had an attraction of her own, and never lacked admirers. She was no sooner installed in Clarence Gate Gardens as permanent secretary than dashing young officers home on leave began to call for her in the evenings, and Violet (or, as she preferred at that time to be called, Vivette) would be seen driving off with them in a taxi, wearing a velvet opera cloak, a bandeau of

artificial leaves, and high-heeled tango shoes tied with criss-crossed satin ribbons high up the ankle. She was young, frank, ambitious and hard-working. Her liking for Edgar was immediate, and she had just that quality of detachment bordering on hardness which made it possible for her to accept the torrent of work which he thrust upon her, the eccentric hours and incalculable moods, with practical philosophy. She was also a highly-skilled shorthand typist, only less mechanically brilliant than Curtis himself, and seemed not to care how late she worked, nor how often. Usually she worked in the two-roomed flat in Yeoman House, but occasionally there would be long and frantic sessions at Clarence Gate Gardens, sometimes even with a second girl to assist her, and Ivy would grow flustered over the extra meals to be ordered for "the typists." There was no love lost between Ivy and Miss King, though they erected a façade of charming consideration and friendliness, and conducted their stealthy instinctive hostilities behind it. Miss King's air of being "in the know," her bustling about the house with armfuls of papers and referring knowledgeably to Edgar's business affairs, annoyed Ivy; the bland "Yes, Mrs. Wallace; no, Mrs. Wallace" with which the girl answered her was not reassuring. She felt nothing against her except the vague jealousy which Daisy had so thoroughly implanted, and, in spite of Miss King's wholesale assumption of responsibility where Edgar's work was concerned, permitted herself no sign of irritation beyond referring to her always as "the typist," and pretending to forget how constantly Edgar reminded her that Miss King was his private secretary. If there was mutual mistrust between Ivy and Miss King, however, there was open hostility between Miss King and Daisy. Daisy, who had been Edgar's constant confidante and companion now for five years, was frankly suspicious of the introduction of a younger woman, and Violet, who was, indeed, nearly twenty years younger, made no secret of the fact that she found it difficult to under-

stand what Edgar saw in Daisy. Thus, though no word of open jealousy was spoken, and unfriendly thoughts were veiled by friendly words, or at least by silence, a hidden current of hostility flowed between the three women, and Edgar was occasionally conscious of sparks and tremors. The strongest antagonism was certainly between Daisy and Miss King, for Ivy, by tacit consent, was out of the running. Even so, the jealousy of the two women was at first of an indefinite and ephemeral nature, and neither of them would have found it easy to account for her apparently irrational coolness towards the other. Miss King, the efficient secretary, had no legitimate reason to be jealous; during the war, attended by her train of young staff officers, she would have laughed at the idea that she would ever marry this heavily-moustached man of forty, in spite of his brilliance and his disturbing magnetism. Daisy, for her part, cannot seriously have feared that this inexperienced girl from a secretarial school would prove a dangerous rival; she herself had known Edgar already for five years, and she cannot have had any suspicion that after another six the upstart Miss King would calmly take him away from her and marry him. Nevertheless, though none of the three can at the time have foreseen these unlikely developments, the seeds of them were as clearly present in 1915 as they were at the end of the war, when Ivy left Edgar for good; or as they were in 1921, when he married his efficient secretary and broke with Daisy.

Edgar, however, had little time to observe the slight ripples of emotion which from time to time ruffled the surface of the household. His life was full, and he would have said without hesitation that it was also happy. He was vaguely aware that all was not well with Ivy; she was grave and silent; but he had grown so used to regarding her as a negative presence in the house—someone who was always there when one left in the morning, and as invariably there when one came back—that he paid little attention. His own time was fully occupied with

work, and his recreations could scarcely, after all these years, be shared with Ivy. The theatre, indeed, was as much work as pleasure; for every sketch, lyric or scrap of dialogue hopefully submitted to de Courville meant hours of sitting in the stalls during rehearsals, ready at the first opportunity to offer a suggestion. He was studying the popular theatre again as he had studied it in Johannesburg, but this time in the belief that revue might be his *métier*. De Courville, discouraged by the small quantity of Edgar's work which he had been able to use, had put him in charge of the Hippodrome publicity department, and these war-time productions, with their recruiting songs, patriotic *tableaux vivants*, jokes about the Kaiser, bully-beef, plum-and-apple jam and conscientious objectors, provided him with much congenial material.

Meanwhile he was still busily running *Town Topics*, and practically writing the paper from cover to cover; supplying his daily column of serious war comment to the *Birmingham Post;* contributing innumerable articles to *Thomson's Weekly News*, a Dundee paper; keeping up an unceasing flow of *Sanders* adventures for Shurey's publications (the war, luckily, had made little difference to Sanders—another advantage of setting the scene of the stories so far away); and through his new friend, Willie Blackwood, a friendly and talkative Scot, writing his first serials for *Answers*. His little war books, written either for boys or as part of cheap paper-backed series, were dictated direct to the dictaphone and transcribed at top speed by the efficient Vivette; they had a reasonably good sale, and were probably what persuaded a small firm to offer Edgar the job of writing the scenario for a privately financed film on the life of Edith Cavell. The film when finished was not a great success, in spite of the white satin souvenirs presented to the audience; but it was responsible for throwing Edgar into a sudden fever of excitement about the new moving pictures. Why in the world, he asked himself, had he not thought of this before? Of course!



Jim.



The photograph known to the world.

—these new moving pictures would be a big thing one day, and he himself would not only write them, he would make them. Within a few days of this decision Ivy was surprised to see a large motion-picture camera arriving by van at the Alfriston bungalow, followed by Edgar with a truckload of canvas scenery. It was all, naturally, to be gloriously successful. He had written a splendid scenario, and the cast should be provided by the family. If necessary one or two of his theatrical friends could be brought down from town to play the difficult parts, but it was more than likely that his own daughter would turn out to be a child actress of remarkable gifts—a star with the drawing power of, say, Mary Pickford. When this epic film was finished he would make a second—a graphic representation of the Battle of Jutland—and both films would be sold to the distributors at a spanking profit. For several weeks the garden of the Alfriston bungalow resembled a film studio's exterior location. A drawing-room set was built in the middle of the lawn with canvas screens, and Miss King and the children submitted to drastic make-up. They rehearsed a little, Edgar directing ("creating actors," as he described it in a letter, "out of mud"), and he turned the handle of his camera for a few hundred feet to see how it would feel. After that everyone's ardour began perceptibly to cool. The theatrical friends who were to have played the difficult parts never arrived, and long-shots of Pat romping jerkily back and forth in front of a painted back-drop grew monotonous even to her father. Edgar decided to concentrate on the Battle of Jutland. For this he had bought more than a hundred water-line models of battleships, and had had a large frame constructed in which the ships could be arranged on a canvas sea and photographed from above, using the cartoon system of photography, the pieces being slightly moved by hand after each revolution of the camera. All went well until a difficulty was presented by the solitary seaplane which had played a minor part in this historic battle. If the

plane were to be shown flying over the battleships, it should be suspended from above; but the whole roof of the frame was occupied by Edgar and his camera. This was a serious stumbling-block, for without the seaplane the Wallace version of the Battle of Jutland would be incomplete. He puzzled over it for some days, and then impatiently washed his hands of the whole matter. The scenery was dismantled in disgust, the camera sent back to London, and the water-line models of the battleships given to the children.

It was unlikely that a man of Edgar's temperament should have been content to take no active part, however small, in civilian war work, and he was gratified when he was admitted, through the introduction of a distinguished barrister, to the Lincoln's Inn branch (Section 9) of the Special Constabulary. This section was made up almost entirely of leading barristers and masters, including the present Lord Chancellor, and its most picturesque duty was to protect the person of the King by night parades in the gardens of Buckingham Palace. It was not an onerous task, though the shifts were five hours long, and the special constables took it in turns to parade from eight till one in the morning, and from one till six. It was a duty which Edgar enjoyed, for besides the pleasure of wearing a sub-inspector's uniform (in which, true to his old weakness, he was photographed in profile) it was an unparalleled opportunity for conversation. After an excellent dinner with his partner of the evening, and much stimulating talk, he would light a cigar, arrange his uniform hat at a becoming angle, and take a comfortable taxi-cab to Buckingham Palace. There, importantly admitted, the pair would stroll for hours at leisure under the trees, their cigars glowing in the dark, discussing military operations and deciding to their own satisfaction what was obviously the best way of winning the war. Criminal law and famous trials, too, were an inexhaustible topic; with such a companion as the late Henry Hughes-Onslow, Master of the

Supreme Court, who usually shared his watch, even the unheard-of exertion of five hours' standing and strolling became almost a pleasure. There was also the agreeable feeling (and one calculated, in Edgar's case, to make a most romantic and flattering appeal) that these convivial after-dinner strolls were protecting the life of one's sovereign as he slept; it was pleasing to calculate how many dastardly attempts on Buckingham Palace had probably been averted by the mere whiff of one's own cigar in the darkness of the shrubbery.

In 1917, too, Edgar undertook certain confidential work for the War Office for which his sympathetic manner and his experience as an interviewer particularly fitted him. As a result of an agreement between the British and German Governments regarding the exchange of incapacitated prisoners of war, invalided British soldiers were arriving in London from the German prison camps, and the Government Committee on the Treatment by the Enemy of British Prisoners of War had been appointed by the Home Secretary to take statements from them concerning their treatment at the enemy's hands. Civilian volunteers whose knowledge and experience equipped them for the task of interrogation, which, since many of the ex-prisoners were suffering from shell-shock and nervous disorders, was a delicate and skilful one, were needed; and Edgar together with a number of other civilians, both men and women, placed his services at the disposal of the Committee. From April 1917, therefore, until after the end of the war, an intermittent procession of British officers and privates was driven to the flat in Clarence Gate Gardens to spend long, quiet and sometimes nervous evenings in Edgar's study, and Miss King added the typing of their statements to her other work, and carried them down to the War Office. In this difficult and sometimes harrowing work Edgar appears to have been particularly successful; he had the gift of inspiring confidence, and his calm personality and sympathetic approach made tolerable for many

of these shattered men an experience which, less skilfully conducted, might well have been a painful ordeal.

In the preceding September Ivy had given birth to a second son, christened Michael Blair.[1] Edgar was pleased, for it was nine years since the birth of their last child, and his passionate delight in babies had not diminished. Nevertheless it was useless to pretend that his relations with Ivy were even outwardly happy; if she had hoped that the child would draw them more closely together she was disappointed. Each by this time knew, or at least suspected, that the last possibility of mutual happiness had vanished. The marriage which they had entered into so confidently fourteen years before, in the face of such opposition, had reached that tragic stage of disillusion where it seemed that no two people could suffer a greater incompatibility. Ivy was not to blame, and even in her most wretched moments refused to blame her husband. It was a tragedy, and one not altogether of their making; she was sadly conscious that in some mysterious way she had proved inadequate. She had meant much to him, she knew, in the beginning, but as time had passed her docile nature had failed to satisfy the needs of his more vigorous spirit. His appetite for life had been enormous. His work, too, of which she had been so proud, had become a wedge forcing them slowly but relentlessly apart; it absorbed his energies, took him among people she did not understand, and left him with a hunger for stimulating company utterly beyond the resources of her nature. She had found it difficult, even impossible to make new friends, and had watched with despairing envy the ease with which Dick inspired both friendship and love. His charm, his vitality, his gentleness had drawn others as surely as they had drawn her long ago, and she could not blame him for accepting new experience. She had had the pain of

[1] Blair was the maiden name of Marie Richards. The choice of this name for his second son suggests that Edgar had formed a more kindly opinion of his mother since her death, and after making the acquaintance of her granddaughter, Miss Grace Donovan.

watching the growth of his relationship with Daisy, and the sharper pang of knowing that this stranger was more congenial, more fundamentally his match than she could ever be. She was faced with the knowledge that even Violet King, young, cool, ambitious and alert, possessed qualities which he needed more than hers. It was an unequal struggle, and the time was past when she could attempt any transformation of her character. Even in their amusements they had failed to find common ground, for she was ill at ease in the theatre as in any public place, and for racing had an unalterable aversion. For years her only recreation had been her music; but Dick had been bored by the piano, and the sound had disturbed him. For the sake of quiet (or so she understood) he pursued his work independently, away from home, and was defensively jealous of this independence. Lonely and unhappy in London, she had at first been glad to spend the summers at Alfriston with the children, but this had in time produced yet another barrier, since it became an accepted arrangement for them to live apart. Solitary as she was, and saddened by the knowledge that Dick no longer needed her, it was inevitable that she should turn elsewhere for affection. It was her tragedy that she should find it so close at hand.

Pierre (though that is not his name) was one of the Belgians to whom Edgar had offered hospitality in the early months of the war. A gentle, friendly, rather scholarly man, he had made a pleasing impression on both of them, and by 1917 had become almost a member of the family. He was fond of the children, undertook to teach mathematics to Bryan, and proved himself a kind and intelligent companion. Edgar, preoccupied as always, was not displeased that Ivy should have some distraction, and sent Pierre to keep her company during the long summer holidays by the sea. Loneliness is a powerful prick to the emotions, and proximity another; and Ivy and Pierre—he an exile from his country, she more than half an exile from her

home—discovered a deep and mutual attraction. Here, it seemed, was the undreamed-of solution to the unhappiness of both, and Ivy, fearful of the step she was taking but encouraged to be resolute, confessed this new and surprising development to Edgar. She was in love with Pierre, she said, and desired her freedom. She would marry again, go abroad when the war was over, and build a new life with a new love, before it was too late.

Tender and understanding as he could always be where his own emotions were not painfully involved, Edgar listened to the story gravely, and asked certain questions. Were Ivy and Pierre genuinely in love? It seemed they were. Would Pierre marry her? Yes: that, too, had been thoroughly discussed. Would she be happy with him, would she be all right? Yes, it appeared she would be very happy; after years of loneliness she had discovered what happiness was. Then was he himself, Edgar asked her, entirely to blame? He had been selfish, he knew, and inconsiderate. Had he made her suffer? But this Ivy was too generous to admit. It was nobody's fault, she told him. It was inevitable. They could part as the tenderest of friends, without regret.

The divorce petition was presented in the summer of 1918, and the decree absolute granted the following June. Edgar retained the custody of the children, but since he and Ivy remained on friendly terms she took Michael with her to her new home in Bournemouth. Bryan was sent to a preparatory school nearby, and only Pat was put in charge of Miss King at Clarence Gate Gardens.

Ivy's story should properly end here, with a second marriage and a gentle fading away into placid happiness, and Edgar undoubtedly wished no less earnestly than she that it might end so; but the divorce, unhappily, marked the beginning of the bitterest years of her life, a period of pain and weariness ending only in death. Pierre, who during his exile had been so ardent

and certain, with the end of the war went home to Belgium, charming but evasive. His letters dwindled, became conversational and cool, and at last ceased; and Ivy, waiting in an agony of doubt for her long-deferred happiness, learned finally, though indirectly, of his marriage.

In despair she turned for comfort and advice to Mr. Caldecott, who was living in Bournemouth; but that self-righteous patriarch, vindicated at last, called her attention to the seventh commandment, and closed his door. From South Africa came the news that her mother, from whom (to spare her pain) she had concealed the failure of her marriage, had suddenly died. Nothing remained for her but to take up the threads of her life again as best she might; and this time, except for Michael, and the holiday visits of her elder children, quite alone. Before her, as she now dimly began to realise, stretched a weary vista of years in which little happiness was to be anticipated, and less hope; years spent in furnished rooms and in houses not her own; in dull seaside resorts and genteel spas, enduring the profitless boredom which lies in wait for solitary gentlewomen such as she, who have asked, albeit recklessly, for bread, and have been given a stone.

CHAPTER V

Winding Up The Machine

WITH Ivy gone, and the two elder children at school, life at Clarence Gate Gardens became strangely quiet. Although Ivy had been at home so little during the past two years the divorce made a sharp division between the old life and the future, and Edgar, finding himself somewhat at a loss and curiously restless, decided to take a holiday. Miss King had already undertaken the domestic supervision of the household, had been buying the children's clothes and keeping account of their periodical visits to the dentist, and now, when they came home for the long summer holidays, she was told to prepare them for a visit to Switzerland.

No expense was spared on the arrangements for the journey, and as England was left behind Edgar's spirits rose. He seems to have felt in some indefinable way that a new life was beginning; as the train sped through France he relaxed into quiet contentedness. Miss King, indeed, was proving an ideal travelling companion. She cheerfully undertook the responsibility of bookings and reservations, paid bills, inspected *wagons-lits*, and took suites in the best hotels without criticism or question. It was the first time she had ever been out of England, and Edgar was delighted with her naïve excitement. She was as pleased as the children with the beauties of Lucerne, appreciative of the luxury of good hotels, and the simple pleasure of taking breakfast coffee and *brioches* above the lake, on an awning-shaded balcony. There was something about her youth and eagerness which was very infectious, and Edgar, dismayed to find that by comparison he appeared almost middle-aged,

pleased himself and shocked the children by shaving off his moustache. He certainly looked younger without it, and more attractive; the clean, powerful lines of his face were more clearly striking than before, and emphasised his air of calm self-confidence.

August was a hot and magnificent month, and for the first and last time in his life Edgar refused to work during a holiday. He found it impossible to remain in his hotel sitting-room while Vivette and the children went off on their various excursions, and for once the tyrannical dictaphone was forgotten. It was far pleasanter to hire a large car and order an expensive picnic basket, and spend the day in the mountains, or to make long and leisurely sight-seeing excursions on the lake steamers. There were shopping expeditions, too, in the different towns, and cafés where he could sit for hours, drinking strong coffee and talking, and choosing delicious pastries for Pat and Bryan. In Lucerne he bought shady hats for Miss King and Pat, and in Interlaken a gold and steel paper-knife, shaped like a Toledo sword, elaborately engraved "To V. K. from E. W." It was an enchanting holiday in which the worries and disappointments of the last few years seemed to have dropped behind, and even Daisy was forgotten. Miss King—alert, intelligent, agreeable, admiring—was better company, he found, than any of them. He refused any longer to address her as Miss King, and began to cast about for a suitable nickname. He disliked her given names, Violet and Ethel, and laughed at the affectation of Vivette; for no particular reason he christened her Jim. Miss King, invited in return to the use of his Christian name, rejected Edgar and expressed a preference for Richard. No one, she knew, who was really intimate with him called him Edgar. That was the name he went by outside the family—the almost professional name used by his Fleet Street friends and racing acquaintances, the people who knew him only outside his home. To Ivy and the friends of his youth he had always

been Dick. To the children, with whom he shared a passionate interest in the adventures of the Krazy Kat of the Herriman strip cartoons, he was, familiarly and irreverently, Krazy. Nobody, so far as she knew, had ever called him Richard or Horatio. Miss King preferred Richard.

The holiday came to an end with the celebration of Pat's twelfth birthday in Paris, where the journey home was broken for the occasion. An open taxi was hired for the day, and there was an orgy of present-buying, followed by a drive in the Bois and the ceremonial consumption of cakes and ice-cream at the Café de la Cascade. From Paris he took them to Ostend to stay with their mother. He had already, at Caux, broken it to the children that he and Ivy had agreed to separate, but in such a manner as to avoid either shocking or distressing them. They had long been used to the idea of partial separation, and the divorce was now explained as a convenient arrangement which would contribute to everyone's happiness. He took particular care to avoid giving them the impression that their mother was in any way estranged, and made it abundantly clear that they were always free to visit her whenever they wished. As if to impress this on them he now took them to Belgium, where Ivy was spending the summer in furnished rooms with three-year-old Michael, and left them there for the remainder of their school holidays.

Back in London, Edgar and Miss King laid plans for a busy winter. The Swiss holiday had been enjoyed without regard to expense; it was now necessary to pay for it. There were, besides, new responsibilities to be met. Bryan had left his preparatory school and was going to Oundle, where, under the famous W. G. Sanderson, Edgar hoped that he would receive the open sesame of public school education which he himself had lacked. Before long Pat was to be promoted from her present school to Cheltenham, and provision had also to be made for Ivy and Michael. It would, indeed, be a hard-

working winter, but his holiday had refreshed him and he was full of schemes. He had a four-novel contract with Ward Lock to fulfil, a collection of short stories and a serial to write for the *Grand Magazine*, and a series of *Four Just Men* adventures for the *Strand*. His American magazine commissions were not as many or as lucrative as he could have wished, but he would attend to that later. For the present it was important to start turning out stories and serials as fast as possible, and he shut himself up in Clarence Gate Gardens as if for a siege. Robert Curtis was skilfully detached from the job which had occupied him since demobilisation, and set to work in Yeoman House, typing from dictaphone cylinders; Miss King (or Jim, as she was now called) undertook the rest of the secretarial work at home. The three were, in many ways, an ideal team—Edgar the productive centre, Jim the buffer to stand between him and distraction, and Bob Curtis the human machine who could convert three days' high-speed dictation into a presentable manuscript. With two such allies work went rapidly and not unpleasantly, and Edgar soon fell into the routine of work which, with certain modifications and elaborations, he pursued to the end of his life.

His working day usually began early, sometimes at five or six in the morning, for his magnificent constitution was satisfied with a minimum of sleep. He rarely slept more than five or six hours in a night, but that sleep was perfect. He possessed, too, the ability to doze for five or ten minutes at a time, at any hour of the day: he did not know the meaning of insomnia. At night it was Jim's last duty to lay out newspaper, firewood and matches in the study hearth, and to see that the tea-tray and electric kettle were put ready. By the time she appeared to breakfast at eight o'clock Edgar was usually sitting at his desk in a dressing-gown, surrounded by a fog of cigarette smoke, and with two or three hours' work already behind him. The empty tea-pot would have been drained of its last cup of

weak, sweet tea, and there would be a pile of manuscript waiting for Jim or a couple of dictaphone cylinders ready for Curtis. After breakfast he would bath and shave and resume his dressing-gown. He found it impossible to work comfortably in a coat and tie, and if there were no need to go out he would wear his dressing-gown all day, even sitting down in it to dinner at night. His requirements for a day's work were a comfortable swivel chair, a large desk or table, his dressing-gown, cigarettes, and an unlimited supply of tea. Generally abstemious where food and drink were concerned, in the matter of tea he was both greedy and fastidious. His constant cigarette-smoking produced an irritating thirst, which was satisfactorily slaked only by weak tea, heavily sweetened and diluted with milk, and freshly made in a china pot every half-hour. The only discomfort he had suffered during his Swiss holiday had been the impossibility of getting tea which he considered fit to drink; it was the last time he went abroad without a picnic basket equipped with cups, flasks for water and milk, his own tea and tea-pot and a spirit kettle. On one occasion, when the *Manchester Evening News* was announcing his *Daughters of the Night* as a coming serial, it published a short anonymous article called "Edgar Wallace—Tea Drinker." "While 'E. W.' works," said the article, "he smokes countless cigarettes through a long holder and drinks innumerable cups of tea, and is one of those happy people who are not disturbed by the presence of a visitor." Edgar, who was not yet (in 1922) sufficiently well known for his personal habits to have become public property, was curious to know who could have contributed these intimate details, and took the trouble to write to the editor of the paper. "My dear Sir," he scribbled on a postcard, "Who wrote 'Edgar Wallace: Tea Drinker?' Apart from the nice and complimentary things that are said, it is so faithful a picture of my life—my very happy life—that it might have been written by my missus. I am awfully pleased and flattered by it." He

discovered that the anonymous writer was his old friend and colleague, A. E. Wilson, who remembered the hectic Hulton days in Temple Chambers, when "at ten o'clock Edgar would sail in rather resplendently, and there would ensue an erratic sort of conference at which he would smoke strange blends of cigarettes, drink innumerable cups of tea, and pour out amazing quantities of ideas for the paper . . ."

In the winter of 1919 he became once more feverishly occupied with the theatre, for Albert de Courville, then at the peak of his career as a producer, had decided that the time had come to make use of Edgar in a big revue, and had asked him to collaborate with Wal Pink and himself in the writing of *The Whirligig*. Edgar by this time knew something of the difficulties and nerve-strain of revue-writing. "Some reverence is indeed due to the 'book' of a revue," he had written several years earlier, "for healthy as it may seem to the onlooker, it is foredoomed to extinction even before it has undergone the test of trial. No revue, at any rate no successful revue, bears any resemblance to the revue as it is at first suggested by the enthusiastic author . . . A revue is built up step by step and almost line by line as the rehearsals proceed . . . You put in a line here, and take out a line there; you change one piece of 'business' for another; you alter the sequence of dances and scenes; you even bully the composer into revising his score and inserting a bar here and there to make your dances or your production numbers more effective." Nevertheless he embraced this new opportunity with enthusiasm, and began pouring out sketches which, he believed, in the hands of Maisie Gay, Anita Elson, Jack Morrison and Billy Leonard would be irresistibly funny. He haunted rehearsals at the Palace Theatre, counting the laughs, and making optimistic calculations of the number which might be expected on the opening night.[1] The "book" of *The Whirligig*,

[1] During actual performances he employed a mechanical counter to record the number of laughs.

read to-day, produces in the mind of the reader a fizzle of disappointment, and the official reader's report, filed in the impersonal cellars of the Lord Chamberlain's Office, puts it coldly on record that "there is no offence if not much brilliance in any of the jokes"; but revue humour is essentially topical and therefore more perishable than any other variety. At all events *The Whirligig* was one of de Courville's biggest successes, and the sketch which is said to have raised the greatest number of laughs is the one which Edgar, with his very real gift for comic Cockney character, wrote for the boisterous Maisie Gay as Mrs. 'Arris. The respectable but slightly salacious charwoman, who sees sin in everything and slips a couple of eggs or a pound of tea into her mysterious bag as nonchalantly as she would adjust her bonnet, is a perennial figure of comedy, and was less faded eighteen years ago than she is to-day. In the hands of that superb low comedienne, Maisie Gay, she became immortal. Her blowzy respectability, her husky voice and beady eye, the predatory way in which her hand strayed as if unconsciously to her employer's cupboard, delighted 1920 audiences to the point of hysteria, and Maisie, wisely aware that her interpretation of Mrs. 'Arris was a minor work of art, added the character to her permanent repertoire.

The run of *The Whirligig* was a period of genuine happiness for Edgar. Not only did he take endless pleasure in rehearsals and performances, but almost the entire cast became his friends. In so nervous and excitable a world his calm and tolerant personality had an attraction of its own, and for his part he was permanently enchanted with the people of the theatre. It became an institution for the principals of the show to dine at Clarence Gate Gardens every Wednesday, between matinée and evening performances, and the rather gloomy flat echoed with the uninhibited laughter of Maisie Gay and Billy Leonard. Every Saturday the chorus, the mechanically precise Tiller Girls, were entertained to roast lamb and ice-cream, all

sixteen of them crowded on assorted chairs round the dining-room table, and greeting the popping of champagne corks with ladylike shrieks. The arranging of these hilarious dinner parties fell, like nearly everything else, on Jim's capable shoulders, and Edgar noted with approval that she was losing her gauche shyness and entertaining his friends with spirit and gaiety.

It was inevitable that this latest contact with the stage should reawaken Edgar's ambition to succeed in the theatre. Since story-writing had been so successfully mastered, why should plays elude him? Heavy drama, as the *African Millionaire* had shown him, was perhaps not his medium, and even his own optimism did not suggest that he could write a revue single-handed. Domestic comedy still remained to be tried, and he decided to write a play made up in equal parts of humour and sentiment. Before this could be tackled, however, there were more pressing things to be done. He was dissatisfied with his American market; stories which sold by the dozen in England had failed to find a place in American magazines, and he was convinced that the only way to put this right was to go to New York, find himself a reliable agent, and make some personal contact with publishers and editors. He had no sooner conceived the idea of acting as his own salesman than Jim was sent hurrying to a steamship agency to make reservations. Everything, even including his daily betting, was to be left in her hands, and he went with the knowledge that all would be efficiently performed.

He stayed in New York only a fortnight, and came away satisfied. He had signed a contract with a literary agent, had met a number of publishers and magazine editors, and was already busy evolving a series of stories commissioned by the *Saturday Evening Post*. He had also, rather to his own surprise, bought a diamond ring for Jim. For some time past his thoughts had been hovering round the possibility of a second marriage, but until the last few months more than one of his friends would

have confidently prophesied that he would marry Daisy. He was still fond of her, and regarded her as a friend, but marriage was a serious undertaking, and the sincere desire to make Daisy permanently happy had been undoubtedly weakened by the attraction of the younger woman. Daisy was charming, no doubt, but Jim in the past five years had become indispensable. She was not only a good companion but a working partner—the Egeria to whom he confided his plans and ideas in the comfortable certainty that she would encourage and admire, the anchor of common sense and placid temper which his extravagant nature needed. She had, moreover, become increasingly desirable; it was hard to believe that this calm, smiling girl of twenty-three, with the curly bobbed hair and the firm mouth (unspoiled, now, by the tendency to unruly teeth which had marred it at eighteen), was the same person who had presented herself at Yeoman House five years ago. Undoubtedly she had improved out of all recognition, and he was by no means the only person to find her attractive. Indeed, it was his sudden jealousy of her many admirers which first awakened him to the fact that he was falling in love; the change which had transformed her from the efficient Miss King into a mature and desirable woman had come about in so subtle and unhurried a manner that he might have continued in the same affectionate and companionable relationship indefinitely if the too frequent appearances of her young men had not startled him. Already Pat, home from Cheltenham for the Easter holidays, had been told by Jim under promise of secrecy that her father had hinted at marriage, and that she had discouraged him. Why she had done so she did not offer to explain; the twenty-three years' difference in their ages may have intimidated her, or she may have been uncomfortably aware of the watchfulness of Daisy. But now, with the successful New York trip behind him and his head filled with ideas, Edgar returned to England with all doubts dispelled. They were so



"His requirements for a day's work were a comfortable swivel chair, a large desk or table, his dressing-gown, cigarettes, and an unlimited supply of tea."



Dictating to Bob Curtis.

well suited, and had been such happy companions for five years, that it was ridiculous not to marry. For Jim, too, his absence in New York had provided an opportunity for reflection. She was sincerely fond of him, she was on affectionate terms with his children, and their association up to the present had been an ideal one. She made no secret of the fact that she was glad of his return, and the diamond ring was given and accepted as a symbol, not of a formal engagement, but of an understanding.

The marriage took place some months later at Marylebone Register Office, as secretly as possible. The chief reason for secrecy was that Edgar was reluctant to break the news to Daisy before the marriage. He had a horror of emotional scenes not of his own making, and believed that a penn'orth of decisive action was worth a pound of discussion. Accordingly Jim was sent in the course of her ordinary secretarial duties to the register office to apply for the licence, and it was hoped that the ceremony would be quietly performed without attracting attention. Unfortunately one of the news agency reporters whose business it was to keep an eye on the registers recognised Edgar's name, and a small paragraph appeared in an evening paper. Aghast, Edgar took a taxi down to Fleet Street and by personal appeals persuaded the principal newspapers to drop this not particularly interesting item; with the result that the brief ceremony was performed almost as privately as he could have wished, the only witnesses being his cook and his chauffeur.

There was no time for a honeymoon. The *Three Oaks Mystery* serial had been left in mid-air when Edgar and Jim took a day off to get married, and the fate of the hero hung perilously in the balance. Besides, Edgar was anxious to make a start on his new play. When that was done, and the enormous profits safely in his pocket, they could perhaps afford to take a holiday. He shut himself up for several days to write it.

A play, he had long ago decided, differed from a story chiefly in that it could not be dictated. Every word must be written carefully by hand, so that he could watch the progress of the dialogue on the page. In later years he was fond of boasting of the phenomenal speed at which he could turn out a play, but in reality he spent more time and trouble on his plays than anything else, and sometimes even had occasion to regret this boast, since it put such an obvious weapon in the hands of his critics.

It was perhaps unfortunate that at the time there should have been a run of sentimental comedies in the London theatres, for Edgar's sentimental hand was a heavy one, and he saw no shame in mawkish situations which should (and did) send shivers of discomfort through a critical audience. The heart-wringing theme of his new play, *M'Lady*, was briefly this: A plumber's wife, Mrs. Carraway, whose criminal lunatic husband is doing a life sentence in Broadmoor for the murder of a policeman, conceives the romantic notion of bringing up her only daughter to believe that she is the orphan child of a foreign countess, and that her mother is nothing more than her faithful nurse. The object of this self-sacrificing deception is apparently to send the girl to Cheltenham, on the profits made by her mother as a second-hand wardrobe dealer, to give her an aristocratic start in life, and have everybody who knows her address her as "m'lady." "Of course," reads the patient official report of the Lord Chamberlain's Office, "he [the criminal lunatic father] turns up and is going to upset everything, but fortunately dies of heart failure, after Herman, Mrs. Carraway's devoted shop-boy, had destroyed his bottle of medicine. Nothing comes out, and 'm'lady,' as Marie is called in the neighbourhood, makes a happy marriage. There is nothing to censor." There was, indeed, nothing to censor, and singularly little to recommend; but Edgar, confident always of success, decided to put the play on himself, so as not to have to divide

the profits with a grasping management. He formed a syndicate, raised the necessary capital among his friends, and leased the Playhouse Theatre. The play opened in July, at the height of a stifling heat-wave, with Miss Henrietta Watson in the part of the self-sacrificing Mrs. Carraway.

As might have been expected, the play received small mercy from the critics. The best that even the friendly *Daily Mail* (which had previously observed that the play was "so touching that during rehearsals the actresses who are not actually on the stage are in tears") could find to say was that "Mr. Wallace is evidently dramatically inclined, and should try his hand at another play"; and *The Times* critic, poking gentle fun, confessed that the tears he had shed for Mrs. Carraway's misfortunes had been wrung from him chiefly by the heat. The friendly reception of the first night, when Jim had worn her first expensive evening dress and Edgar had made a proud speech after the final curtain, had apparently meant nothing. Together they searched the newspapers for a word of praise, and dropped them one by one on the study floor. *M'Lady* was a failure. On the second night the theatre was desperately "papered," and on the third and fourth nights it was barely half-full. The play was taken off at the end of a fortnight with the melancholy distinction of being the outstanding fiasco of the season.

Edgar's buoyancy in the face of failure was always remarkable, and on this occasion, after the inevitable few hours of extravagant despair, he turned his back on it with resolution. It was, indeed, one of the sharpest disappointments of his life, for it had been his first London production, and in view of its jeering reception it seemed unlikely that he would ever have another. He was, nevertheless, an admirable loser, and having not yet arrived at the point where he believed any failure of his to be due to the ignorance of the public, he shrugged his shoulders over this defeat as he would have done over any

unfortunate gamble. At least, he pointed out to the indignant Jim, he had learned something from this failure, and in any case he had enjoyed directing rehearsals. Next time, of course, it would be a different story. Having learned all there was to know, his next West-End play was bound to run for a year. As it happened, he was right; but five years of uphill work and many rejected plays still lay between him and that moment of fortune.

Meanwhile the financial losses of *M'Lady* had got to be retrieved, for the backers were not prepared to lose their money without a struggle. There was nothing for it but to turn out a flood of serials, novels, short stories and articles as fast as his facile brain could invent and Curtis type them; and in this, for the first time in his life, he had outside encouragement, for he had recently put himself in the hands of Mr. A. S. Watt, the literary agent, and panting at Mr. Watt's right hand was an eager publisher. It is almost incredible that up to this time Edgar should have disposed of all his book rights (he had already written twenty-eight novels, including serials) so heedlessly, selling them outright for £70 or £80 without a thought of royalties. A few months before, however, hearing some rumour that other authors were in the habit of receiving comforting little incomes from their successful books, he had consulted Mr. Watt on his publishing arrangements, and Mr. Watt had been very properly shocked. More, he had been active, for Sir Ernest Hodder-Williams, head of the publishing firm of Hodder and Stoughton, had been making discreet enquiries about this promising new writer of thrillers, and in almost less time than it takes to tell Mr. Watt had brought Edgar and Sir Ernest together, and had proudly fathered a good six-novel contract. According to this new arrangement Edgar was to receive £250 advance royalties on delivery of each manuscript, and the usual rising scale of payment according to the sales of the book. This would have been a

satisfactory arrangement with any sound publisher, but Sir Ernest was more than that; he had, where Edgar Wallace was concerned, a prophetic intuition which told him that this none too successful man, already nearing his fifties, had the makings of one of the greatest popular entertainers of all time. He believed that Wallace's greatest success would lie in the production of quantity rather than literary quality. Quality, in his opinion, was clearly and sufficiently evident in his work; suspense, action and excitement were already there, humanised by a deft touch in characterisation and an easy humour. What was wanted was quantity—quantity to flood the reading market and penetrate to levels which had not been reached before, to bring entertainment, excitement and pleasure within the grasp of a vast public of which publishers had never dreamed. Having followed Edgar's progress and judged his man, he was convinced that his most successful work would be struck off at white heat, not slowly and laboriously evolved, and that the only way to get the best out of him was to induce him to work continuously at top pressure. How Edgar's work might have developed if he had not been encouraged into mass-production is difficult to judge: reading his early *Sanders* stories and even his newspaper dispatches, many of which were written with pain and care and by no means rapidly, one is tempted to think that, differently circumstanced, he might have developed into a serious artist, and not have remained content to be a splendid and sensational craftsman. It is possible, but it is perhaps not very probable. His temperament—facile, brilliant, confident, impatient—was against any slow and painful perfecting of his medium. His extraordinary facility, and the confidence which it inspired in him, had set a trap into which he had fallen long before. Years of newspaper work, in which speedy delivery had been essential and the quick death of everything he wrote inevitable, had ingrained in him the habit of writing crisply, superficially, and for the moment. His friend, Willie Blackwood,

who had a great admiration for him and firmly believed him capable of better things than the successful serials which he poured out so rapidly for *Answers*, had often begged him to reduce his output and concentrate on the improvement of his style; but to this plea he had received always the same reply—"The good stuff may be all right for posterity, but I'm not writing for posterity. I'm writing for to-morrow morning's newspaper." Even to Blackwood's warning tale of a written-out serial writer of his acquaintance, who had never had fewer than six serials running simultaneously, and had exhausted himself by hammering out 40,000 words a week for many years, he got no response beyond an amused chuckle and the unpromising comment—"Then he's a bigger bloody fool than I am." Edgar's incurable extravagance, too, which was part of his gambler's nature, and always led him to live wildly beyond his means, tilted the balance heavily in favour of prolific output. Money was always spent as soon as earned, if not before, and the easiest way out of any difficulty was to rake in another cheque as quickly as possible. His quick brain, which grasped at ideas and charged them at once with superficial drama, made him impatient of considered thought or emotional development; his was the mind of the brilliant artificer and puzzle-maker, taking an intense pride in ingenuity for its own sake, and rich in the invention of surprising and picturesque solutions. The intricate problems which he set himself in mystery and plot fascinated him far more than the hidden and difficult discipline of good writing. His very inventiveness produced a vanity of its own, making him boast of his fertility of ideas and his speed of working, and completing the vicious circle by forcing him to live up to the phenomenal legend which he himself had created. Whatever ambition he may have had in his early days of becoming a great writer, he had certainly lost it by the time he was forty, and cared only for success. Where other writers had reached thousands of readers, he aimed at millions,

for those millions and the rewards they brought him were, to him, the tangible measure of his achievement. There is a faint flavour of sour grapes in the contempt with which, in his middle years, he dismissed all serious novelists as "highbrow," but before he was fifty that contempt had become a genuine opinion. It was not, as he often said, his aim to instruct or uplift, but simply and commercially to entertain, and in this he followed in the traditions of all great story-tellers, and succeeded, moreover, beyond his wildest dreams. It was also his ambition, and always had been, to make a fortune, and the directing hand of Sir Ernest Hodder-Williams set him firmly on the path he had sought so long. If there ever had, in the beginning, been a possibility of his becoming a disciplined and self-critical writer, it had dwindled to a shadow long before he was urged into mass-production. A possibility far more unexpected, far more startling and bizarre, had taken its place.

The new association with Hodder and Stoughton opened his eyes, as nothing else had done, to his own possibilities as a money-maker. He did not regret the lost royalties of the past, since crying over spilt milk was not a part of his nature, but he was enchanted with the thought of the royalties to come. Before long he was writing to his publisher:

"Dear Sir Ernest,—

"I have sent the proofs to Mr. Ralph. I can find no flaw in them. I am living on crusts of bread and raw apples until my royalty cheques come in. It is wonderful to have royalties at all, and royalties that come after the bankruptcy proceedings of Christmas that leave a man with only his furniture to eat—and that not properly seasoned—are most wonderful of all. Thank God I am selling in America."

And again, a few months later:

> "As regards a new contract, I shall be delighted to sign it. I can only assure you that never again will I stray from the path of virtue and sell my beautiful mind to the longs and shorts of the publishing business. Until I came to you I had never seen a royalty cheque, and had come to regard my book rights as a kind of bonus for my serials!"

He responded joyfully to Sir Ernest's assurance that Hodder and Stoughton were prepared to publish his books as fast as he could write them. The success of the system may be gauged from the fact that during the next ten years they published no fewer than forty-six, and the sales of those books ran literally into millions.

This torrential output, amounting (since many of his books were published by other firms) to more than a hundred and fifty separate works in twenty-seven years, is a phenomenon which cannot be explained simply by a more than normal capacity for work, or by any routine of daily mechanical production. Wallace was fundamentally lazy, and though he could on occasion work at greater pressure and for longer hours than most other writers, he did so only when necessity was hard upon him. To a superficial observer, indeed, he might often appear to be a man of remarkable idleness. He was a familiar figure on every race-course, and men who devote a large portion of their time to racing are not normally hard workers. Every winter, too, following his second marriage, saw him in Switzerland, apparently taking a holiday, and in his later years he spent much of his time on theatrical and political enterprises. To his friends his physical laziness was a legend: his distaste for the drudgery of writing had driven him to dictation; he had been known to take a taxi for a distance of a

hundred yards to avoid walking; and in all the years that he lived on the first floor of Clarence Gate Gardens he had never been known to go up or come down except by the elevator. He boasted that he rarely walked more than four miles in a year, and it was undoubtedly the complete lack of exercise in early middle age which produced the worrying corpulence of his fifties. Yet, for all his physical lethargy (or perhaps, as he himself came to believe, partly because of it) he possessed a fund of mental energy far above the normal. Added to this, his quick brain and telling facility of expression made a combination of talents which perfectly fitted him to become a prolific and popular author. Ideas flowed into his consciousness without effort, and, since he lacked any deep reflective instinct, he felt no critical urge to pause and examine them. To him they were the raw material of the story-teller, and if they could not be immediately fitted into the smooth mechanics of entertainment he rejected them. Born with a fertile brain and the gift of fluency, and fashioned by long habit into a man who knew how to make profitable use of both gifts without waste of labour, he applied himself to his trade with a concentration which was none the less fierce because it was intermittent. His robust constitution enabled him, when the need was urgent, to work for long periods which a man of less vitality would have found impossible. He might be seen at the races in the afternoon, complacent and unhurried, and be found in the card-room of the Press Club for an hour before dinner; yet if there were work on hand his study light would burn in the tobacco-filled room until long after midnight, and he would already have done three hours' early morning work when he appeared at breakfast. The mechanical side of his work he left to others. Once he had spoken the last word of a serial into the dictaphone, the story, so far as he was concerned, was satisfactorily finished. Bob Curtis would transform it into manuscript, and he and Jim between them would punctuate, correct and comb it

for errors. Working at such speed, and concentrating on the ravelled intricacies of plot, it was inevitable that mistakes, sometimes of the most glaring description, should appear in the uncorrected copy; characters would change their names two or three times in a story—in spite of the fact that he kept a pencilled list of them propped up before him—and it was Curtis's responsibility to keep track of them. Sometimes it happened that Curtis, who, though an excellent and intelligent typist, was not a highly educated man, would pass over errors of grammar or fact as blithely as Edgar himself, but this seems not to have been regarded as important by either author or publisher. Edgar's conscience was never troubled by minor inaccuracies, and he had an omnivorous habit of sweeping half-digested scraps of information into his narrative, to create an impression or heighten his local colour; it would certainly have caused him no heart-burning to know how many such slips would survive, uncorrected, into the latest of present-day editions.

Even so, though he eventually became the greatest best-selling author of all time, he was by no means the most prolific of modern writers. Several of the serial spinners whose blood-chilling narratives appeared in the same periodicals as his own could claim a greater number of published works—notably the 40,000-word-a-week phenomenon who had been the subject of Willie Blackwood's conscientious warning. None of these other, however, had achieved a hundredth part of his success, or created his legend, and for the legend Edgar's own vanity was partly responsible. Admitting, as he frankly did, that his work possessed little literary value, he was yet determined that the world should recognise him as unique, and his amazing facility promised at least an alternative fame. Rapid and prolific he undoubtedly was, but his pride fed the legend of prodigious output until it became first a joke and then an object of suspicion, and created a rumour which never ceased

to exasperate him. The popular joke about the "weekly Wallace" progressed until it was the "midday Wallace" for which readers were supposed to clamour, and there were other stories about telephone callers who offered to hold the line when told that Mr. Wallace was engaged, writing a serial. Some publishers might have resented these jokes as bad business, but Sir Ernest Hodder-Williams was shrewd enough to see that they were, on the contrary, heaven-sent publicity, and all but adopted the "midday Wallace" joke as a slogan. Naturally, as the legend of his output grew, there were plenty of scoffers ready to affirm that the work was not all his own—that his secretary wrote half of it, that he employed a "ghost," three "ghosts," half a dozen, that he was the figure-head of a gigantic literary syndicate. This rumour, since it wounded his pride, never ceased to annoy him—the more so since, once started, it seemed impossible to stop. It was useless to offer, as he did, a reward of £5,000 to anyone who could prove that a single word which had appeared under his name had been written by another; useless for his wife, his children, or his secretary (who were used to seeing the machine at work, and knew its capabilities) to protest with sincerity that the rumour was both baseless and malicious; useless for Edgar to point out that no one had yet succeeded in producing one of these mysterious "ghosts," and that, if the "ghosts" existed and were capable of writing best-sellers under another man's name, it was a curious kind of madness not to write them under their own. Without the least shred of evidence to support it, and in face of the earnest denials, not only of Edgar himself but of all who knew him and were familiar with his methods, the rumour teased him like a noisy bluebottle to the end of his life, and even pursues him with a certain smug uncharitableness beyond the grave. As late as May, 1931, less than a year before Edgar died, this criticism appeared in the *Daily Telegraph*: "How Edgar Wallace accomplishes and executes all the work that

passes under his name he only can tell . . . If only Edgar Wallace would give himself sufficient time to write a really first-class play he could take a very much higher place in the esteem of the general public than he now occupies. People have come to expect nothing from him but thrills and excitement, relieved by a low order of comicality." There is some justice in the second part of this criticism, but the first sentence, the hint at "all the work that passes under his name," is simply an irritated critic's jab with a rusty needle. His peculiar talents being what they were, and flogged, as time went on, to their last ounce of strength, a "ghost" was the only thing in the world that he never needed.

But this is to look a long way ahead—ten years beyond the time when Sir Ernest Hodder-Williams evolved his mass-production plan for his new writer, and Edgar was falling in with the scheme with as much delight as if he had invented it himself. It came at an auspicious moment, for Edgar, now forty-six, was becoming rapidly more experienced and mature as a writer of thrillers, was perfecting the trick of holding his reader poised between action and suspense, and developing the constructional technique on which he was to build his most sensational successes. A year or two before, Sir Ernest might have found him a doubtful investment, but now, egged on by his publishers and confident of his powers, a phenomenal success seemed almost certain. As soon as they had published five of his novels Hodder and Stoughton began to advertise, and placards urging the public to "MAKE THIS AN EDGAR WALLACE YEAR!" covered the book-stalls. They were gambling on Sir Ernest's original prophecy, and one can judge that they were not disappointed by the fact that in the second year of their association Edgar produced *The Crimson Circle*, which, according to the latest available figures, has up to the present sold just under half a million copies.

The books which he produced during the following eight

years fall into several well-defined categories. The most typical, and by far the largest group, are those which depend for their interest almost exclusively on intricate and sensational plot, and in which the characters are little more than puppets. The straightforward "crime thriller," the typical Edgar Wallace book, belongs to this group: *The Crimson Circle*, *The Green Archer*, *A King By Night*, *The Dark Eyes of London*, *Terror Keep* and *The Man From Morocco* are half a dozen of the more famous titles which come to mind.

Those books which depend primarily on the interest of their central character, and in which plot takes a secondary place, are less numerous, but have been by no means less successful; they are, in fact, considered by many Wallace enthusiasts to be his best work. In this group are all the books written round the characters of Sanders, Bosambo and Bones; those which follow the adventures of the little Cockney tipster, Educated Evans, and the old-fashioned, spinsterish detective, Mr. J. G. Reeder. The *Smithy* books, *The Gunner* and *The Orator*, fall into this category. Mr. Reeder is perhaps an exception, since he seems to belong almost equally well to either group; the mysteries he unravels are as intricate as his character is picturesque; and if we do not completely believe in either the old gentleman or his adventures, it makes little difference to our enjoyment. Wallace's characters are all two-dimensional; they have no depth, though their backs and fronts are adorned with as many mannerisms, characteristics and turns of humour as should convince any reader in search of light and exciting entertainment; and his plots, in the same way, are so permeated with the improbable that the reader, once hypnotised by the breathless anxiety to know what happens next, loses all touch with reality, and wanders in a maze of confusion and suspense through a hair-raising criminal world built of the purest fantasy. Despite its horrors, though, it is a reassuring world, for the hero always wins in the end, crime never pays, love finds

a way, and the heroine is always saved from worse than death. It is a world of impossibly clever criminals, who assume a hundred different disguises and slip like diabolical quicksilver through the fingers of Scotland Yard; a world in which Things and Terrors disconcertingly abound, gibbering in secret rooms and rattling their chains, performing terrible murders between-whiles at the bidding of a master mind, and driving off with cackles of fiendish laughter in their high-powered cars. There are comforting figures, of course, in this fantasy world, for the hero is always brave, humorous and resourceful, and just the thing for the heroine, and there is a sprinkling of comic Cockney criminals whose hearts are frequently in the right place even if their fingers are slippery. Nothing is ever precisely what it seems. The sinister figure lurking on the roof turns out, after chapters of suspense, to be a benevolent detective, and the bland clergyman possesses a criminal record. Respectable-looking houses contain secret doors and ingeniously constructed death chambers, and even so blameless an institution as a home for the blind is eventually revealed as the headquarters of a desperate gang. It is all presented with such dash and flair, with such a confidence of statement, such an instinct for suspense and dramatic surprise, that the reader's critical faculty is numbed, and he moves breathlessly forward in an amazed dream, unable to relinquish the thread until it comes to an end.

Subsidiary to these two main groups—the plot novels and the character novels—is a third which has racing as its central theme, though spiced with a pungent criminal flavour. The *Educated Evans* books are on the fringe of this group (though they properly belong to the character novels) and a number of others—*Captain Tatham of Tatham's Island*, *Grey Timothy*, *Down Under Donovan*, *The Admirable Carfew* and *The Flying Fifty-Five* are well inside it.

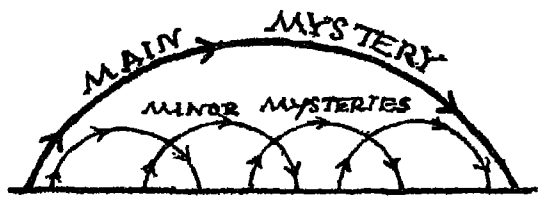
A fourth group can conveniently be made of those books

which were written round an isolated idea, the experiments which, though successful, he never chose to repeat. These include *Captains of Souls* (a thriller built on the idea of soul transmigration), *Chick* (the adventures of a bank clerk who inherits a peerage), *The Books of Bart* (a love story), *The Day of Uniting* (the supposed end of the world through collision with a comet), *The Devil Man* (a highly fictionised account of the life of Charles Peace), and *The Northing Tramp*, which is partly a crime story but chiefly concerns the relationship between a spoiled heiress and the tramp whom she marries out of pique, and who is eventually able to add to her happiness by revealing himself as an earl.

His method of writing a thriller was nearly always the same. Before beginning to dictate he would have worked out a bare skeleton of the story in his mind, the selection of characters, and, most important of all, the dramatic end. The basic idea of the story would be thus clearly established, the chief mystery and its solution decided on, and certain blood-curdling situations thought out which he intended to reach; but beyond this the development of the plot would be as great a puzzle to him as it would be to the reader. He made no notes, beyond a list of the characters' names, and he spun the complicated thread of his plot as he went along. Sometimes the events of the story would take an unexpected turn, diverting him, for the sake of some incidental excitement, from his original plan; but these deviations never disturbed him, and he made no attempt to avoid them. Instead, the new situation would be made to yield the fullest possible advantage, and the plot would move briskly along a fresh track to its prearranged destination. Thus, the progress of his serials was more or less hand-to-mouth; he rarely knew, from one instalment to the next, what was likely to happen, and unblushingly extricated his characters from fatal predicaments in every other chapter. There is a pleasing story, told of a serial writer for boys' magazines, which is

scarcely an exaggeration of Edgar's methods. The writer, according to the story, had gone away for a week's holiday, leaving his hero, Jack Strangeways, bound and gagged at the bottom of a pit, of which the red-hot walls were slowly closing in; and promised to deliver the solution with the next instalment. Days went by, however, and no instalment appeared, and frantic enquiries failed to locate the writer. In despair the magazine staff, from the editor down, set to work to supply the missing chapter, but try as they might they could hit on no way of getting Jack Strangeways out of his horrible predicament. At the last moment the missing writer returned, sat down to an office typewriter, rolled up his sleeves, and prepared to supply the answer. Fascinated, the others gathered round, anxious to see how he would deal with a situation which had beaten all of them. Without a moment's misgiving he attacked the typewriter. "With one bound," they read over his shoulder, "Jack Strangeways was free . . ."

Despite the apparent variety of Wallace's thrillers, the plan of construction and the *dramatis personæ* are nearly always the same. Unlike most writers of mystery stories, who have to devote the last couple of chapters to sorting out the tangle, he set and then solved new problems all the way through the book, keeping only his basic mystery unexplained until the end. Inside the frame of the principal mystery, minor mysteries, slightly overlapping, are started like hares and pursued for a short distance, each new problem being set immediately before the solution of its predecessor. This construction is perhaps most easily explained by a simple diagram:



By this means the end of the story is left unencumbered by tedious explanations, and the author is free to concentrate on one big *dénouement*, or—which is more usual in the Wallace books—a thrilling pursuit sequence.

The characters in a typical Wallace thriller run invariably to type. The cast is nearly always the same, and may be simplified as follows:

The hero: Usually a detective, occasionally a newspaper reporter. If a detective, he is no ordinary one, but an expert sleuth employed by Scotland Yard (Larry Holt in *The Dark Eyes of London*), the Foreign Office (Selby Lowe in *A King By Night*), the Public Prosecutor's Office (Mr. J. G. Reeder), the river police (John Wade in *The India Rubber Men*), or some other special branch.

The heroine: A beautiful girl, sometimes of independent means, more usually a secretary, who always in the course of the story turns out to be deeply though innocently involved in a financial plot, and therefore the object of the villain's machinations. She is always partly responsible for the solving of the mystery, and rarely escapes being locked in an attic or a dungeon with a homicidal monster.

1st villain: The master mind of a criminal gang; his identity is rarely revealed until just before the end of the book, when the plot is narrowed down to a pursuit sequence which ends in his capture or death. Until this point, he usually appears to be a sympathetic and blameless character, and often pretends to assist the police.

2nd villain: His identity is generally revealed fairly early in the book, and the reader's suspicions are deliberately concentrated on him. He is, however, only the figure-head of the gang, and the tool of No. 1, whom he sometimes betrays.

3rd villain: A monster of some kind, possessed of superhuman strength and savage cunning, employed by villains 1 and 2 in the accomplishment of their crimes. He is usually murdered

by them before the end, and commands at least a vestige of the reader's sympathy. He is a frequent though not an invariable member of the cast.

Minor characters, who are always numerous, usually include a comic petty thief or other criminal, unless, as in the case of Mr. Reeder, the humour is supplied by the hero himself.

The main scene of the stories is usually London, sometimes with subsidiary mysteries staged abroad, and the Thames often plays an important part. The police, though continuously baffled (the mystery would soon collapse if they were not), are never held up to ridicule. The love interest is perfunctory, and the sexual morality of the characters above reproach. The female associates of even the worst villains turn out to be their wives or daughters, and the heroine, for all her deplorable experiences, is never called upon to endure anything which might bring a blush to the most sensitive cheek. "There is so much nastiness in modern literature which makes me feel physically sick," Edgar once told the Worshipful Company of Stationers, "that I like to write stories which contain nothing more than a little innocent murdering."

A study of his crime novels reveals a repetition of ideas which is perhaps inevitable, and goes some way towards explaining their great number and apparent variety. He was fond of relating the method by which certain African tribes were supposed to catch monkeys—a ripe date would be dropped through a small hole cut in a gourd; the monkey, finding it, would thrust in his paw to grasp the date, and would find it impossible to withdraw the clenched fist holding the fruit; too greedy to loose the date, he would remain struggling to release his paw from the bulky gourd until he was caught. Translated into human terms, the parable of the monkey and the gourd forms the theme of three of his novels. In *The Man From Morocco* a criminal, the evidence of whose guilt is written in indelible ink on a £100,000 treasury note in his own possession,

is finally brought to justice because his greed will not allow him to destroy it. The same idea is repeated, with variations, in *The Book of All-Power* and *The Million Dollar Story*. Another favourite story concerns a gang of criminals who steal a battleship or a liner and defy the world; this theme is introduced in four books. In at least four novels the villain and his gang have their headquarters in a seemingly respectable establishment—a laundry, an office building, a luxury hotel, the headquarters of a masonic lodge, an asylum for the blind—and secretly convert it, sometimes even without the knowledge of the inmates, into a honeycomb of death-cells and hidden passages. A mysterious mechanical house, evolved by a master criminal, in which the floors go up and down like elevators, rooms are flooded with water, acid, or gas at the touch of a button, and safes and cupboards conceal entrances to secret passages, appears in several novels; and a mysterious personage who holds the key to the main mystery and flits maddeningly in and out of the story, keeping it to himself (*The Man Who Knew*, *The Man From Morocco*, *The Man Who Was Nobody*), is used to tantalise the reader in at least half a dozen.

It can be objected that his characters, clearly cut though they are, and equipped with attributes and mannerisms which are consistent and unmistakable, lack any real depth, and consequently reality; but this is not due merely to their author's disinclination or inability to realise his characters subjectively—it is also the effect of one of the conventions of "mystery" writing. Where it is the author's intention to keep his reader guessing as to the identity of his villain, it is obvious that he must not admit the reader to that villain's thoughts, and, since to give an insight into the thoughts of all his characters save one would inevitably mark his man, it necessarily follows that the story must be told in terms not of thought but of action. Wallace observed this rule carefully, with the result that his characters are seen only objectively, and are decidedly thin.

His heroes are all heroic, his heroines all pure, and his villains unequivocally villainous.

He was fond of saying that a crime mystery was best presented in the spirit in which a reporter would make his investigations—objectively, following first one clue or development and then another, and sticking to facts. Analysis of thought or emotion belonged to another kind of writing. This detachment is to a very great degree responsible for his enormous popularity, for the average reader of thrillers has no particular wish to have his withers wrung. He demands excitement without anxiety, suspense without fear, violence without pain and horror without disgust; and in Wallace's fantasy world, in which everything is rather larger than life and probability magnificently dispensed with, he finds that safe excitement and escape from reality which is the basis of all popular entertainment. With these ingredients, and skilfully gauging the appetite of his vast public, Wallace brought the art of popular entertainment to a pitch which had never before been achieved by any writer. The demand for his work, to which his prodigious sales bear lasting witness in nearly every country in the world, seems to prove beyond any doubt that what the vast majority of ordinary people demand from their recreational reading is purely escape and excitement.

He fell as completely under the spell of this excitement as any of his readers, and believed that each story, as he wrote it, was his best. There was no affectation or deliberate salesmanship in the invariable statement which accompanied the slapping down of his latest manuscript on his publisher's desk: "Here you are —and it's the best story I've ever written!" He believed it implicitly—until he had started another. As he grew older this cheerful self-complacency, the result of over-confidence, tended to impair his judgment, and weakened his faculties of self-criticism. On one occasion he dismayed his old friend and admirer, Willie Blackwood, by sending him the first 15,000

words of a serial so confused, so unconvincing and so hastily written, that Blackwood was compelled to return the manuscript with a tactfully phrased request that it should be revised. By return of post he received a furious note:

"DEAR WILLIE,—

"You have lost your judgment. Thank God I haven't lost mine. I shall write for you no more."

Naturally annoyed, Blackwood replied that it was, on the contrary, Edgar's judgment which had been lost, that he had become swollen-headed, and that his decision to write no more for *Answers* was unconditionally accepted. Edgar's resentment of criticism, however, was rarely long-lived. A few days later came a telephone call from Jim, inviting Blackwood in her most persuasive voice to lunch with them at Ciro's. At luncheon Edgar's manner was elaborately off-hand, though slightly sheepish, and before the meal was over he casually mentioned that the unsatisfactory serial had been put in the fire and that he was writing another.

Serial-writing, on which he depended so largely for his income, was not without its adventures. There was the embarrassing occasion when Lord Northcliffe, then the proprietor of *Answers*, noticed Edgar's name in a list of commissioned serials, and, remembering with annoyance that after all these years Edgar still owed him £500 of the original £1,000 which he had lent him after the failure of *The Four Just Men*, refused to sanction the commission. Blackwood, knowing how anxiously Edgar was counting on the £300 which had been promised for the story, broke the bad news to him regretfully, but Edgar was more than equal to the emergency. At his suggestion Blackwood secretly paid him £200 in advance; Edgar immediately sent a cheque to Northcliffe for £150, and the Chief, mollified by this sudden evidence of good faith, instantly lifted his ban on Wallace serials.

A little later, when another serial was due, Edgar was in a more than usually desperate plight for money, and confessed to Blackwood that the promised cheque would by no means get him out of his difficulty. At Blackwood's suggestion they decided to try and sell the story to America. He, Edgar and Jim between them compressed the first instalment into skeleton form, added a typical Wallace message to the effect that it was the best story he had ever written, and that he was prepared to sell it to the *Chicago Daily News* for a reasonable figure for quick acceptance. The whole thing was cabled to Chicago. The cable charges came to £80, which Edgar and Blackwood between them managed to borrow, and the following day an acceptance and $5,000 were cabled back—a net profit, as Edgar joyfully pointed out, of £920 on one day's work, since nothing now remained but the actual writing.

During these years of increasing pressure of work Edgar divided his leisure between racing and the Press Club. Now that he was no longer on the staff of any newspaper, the Press Club was his most intimate connection with the newspaper world, and his affection for Fleet Street increased as he got farther away from it. He was proud of his past newspaper experience, and still loved to describe himself as a reporter. The word "journalist" he disliked because of its refined and amateurish flavour; "newspaperman" had not yet come into general use in England, and "reporter" connoted hard professional experience. A good deal of his work as a staff reporter in London he had not enjoyed; the tiresome routine and petty assignments had bored him; but he looked back on his work as a foreign correspondent with pleasure and pride, and it was chiefly of this that he liked to think when he described himself as a reporter. In the Press Club he found all the pleasures of association with Fleet Street without the drudgery, and the card-room became almost a second headquarters. His gambler's temperament led him to poker rather than bridge; he

excelled in neither game, but proved himself, as in racing, an imperturbable loser. His appearance was a signal to better players that there was money to be made, but the fact that he was an indifferent performer did not disturb him.

He had long cherished an ambition to be chairman of the club, and as early as 1909 had fought a club election with all the elaborate frivolity which was a conventional part of these occasions. He had made an election address, composed offensive verses about his opponents for the Press Club's election newspapers, and each time (he had stood for chairman at least twice before the war) had been crushingly defeated. His opponents in return had replied with verses equally scurrilous, with jibes at his spats, his moustache, his self-complacency, his tendency to regard West Africa and the British Army as his own inventions, and to resign from the committee or the Press Club altogether at the least hint of criticism. Press Club politics in those days were energetic in character and raffish in tone, and Edgar had thoroughly enjoyed them. Nevertheless, his ambition to become chairman had been serious, and when, in 1923, he was eventually elected, he accepted the honour with almost childish pleasure. He was determined to leave his mark during his year of office, and by good luck hit on an innovation which succeeded beyond his dreams. His passion for racing, coupled with his great admiration for Lord Derby, led him to wonder whether the Press Club might not give an annual luncheon to celebrate the greatest classic horse-race in the world. Excitement naturally ran high in the Press Club, as everywhere else, before the event, and Edgar's scheme was no less than that all the principal owners, trainers and jockeys should be invited to luncheon as the guests of Fleet Street on the Monday before the race. A private luncheon on these lines could have had no hope of success, but racing and newspapers are to a large extent interdependent, and Lord Derby, in common with the other great figures of the turf, immediately

saw that such a function would be not only pleasant but extremely valuable. The first Derby luncheon, held when Edgar had been chairman of the club for only three months, was an unqualified success. Owners, trainers and jockeys made speeches and prophecies which received the widest publicity, and the luncheon was immediately established as the Press Club's most brilliant social function.

Edgar was enchanted with the success of his idea, and freely confessed that he was prouder of his Derby luncheon than of any other accomplishment. He had certainly spared no pains to make it a success. The menu had been the subject of anxious conferences, and Edgar himself had provided the flowers, flatteringly arranged in the racing colours of the different owners. He had taken the chair himself and had made an excellent speech which more than justified his pride in his talents as a speaker. "He was a master," said one of his fellow-members,[1] "of the art which may be said to be a mixture of humour, narration, some serious reflection, a little sentiment and a touch of imagination. His great art at the Derby lunch was the technique he set for drawing forth from subsequent speakers delightful and happy replies. He could set an atmosphere as well as any master-actor in a theatre. One was always sorry when Edgar sat down, but he always sat down at the right time."

The successful institution of the Derby lunch was mainly responsible for his re-election to the chair of the club the following year, and even after he had been succeeded by other chairmen he continued to preside at the luncheon each year until his death. His only disappointment was that Jim, before whom he loved to shine, was excluded by the rules of the club from being present, and on several occasions he smuggled her in by the staff entrance so that she could listen to the speeches

[1] Mr. Horace Sanders, a former chairman of the Press Club, to whom (and to the Press Club itself) I am indebted for much valuable information, and for facilities for consulting all club records concerning Edgar Wallace.

(which would have been considerably bowdlerised if the presence of a woman had been suspected) from behind one of the service hatches. It increased his pleasure immeasurably that she should have at least a glimpse of him in the chair he was so proud to occupy—how unaffectedly proud his fellow-members knew. It was a happy choice which led them, after his death, to perpetuate his memory with the big carved chair which is occupied at all club functions by the chairman.

Being chairman of the Press Club, though, and inaugurating the Derby lunch were only two of the many satisfying experiences which came in the same year. For the first time, largely owing to Hodder and Stoughton's royalty cheques, to the growing strength of his American sales and to the business-like management of his literary affairs by Mr. A. S. Watt, he was beginning to reap a substantial reward from his work, and lost no time in spending his money on several extravagant ambitions. The first and most anxiously cherished of these was to be a race-horse owner; the second to become a box-holder at Ascot. The days when he had been satisfied to be an ordinary punter, working out racing form with Curtis in the Yeoman House flat and placing his bets by telephone, were long past; the pleasures of racing had taken so firm a hold on him that he was unwilling to miss any single association with the sport. He had already been a punter, a racing journalist and a tipster; had even, when he was urgently in need of several hundred pounds, started a "book," and by means of hasty circularisation done a brisk three-day business as a bookmaker. Now he had set his heart on wearing an owner's badge, registering his racing colours, strolling importantly in the ring, leading in winners and whispering last-minute instructions to respectful jockeys.

Unfortunately his luck as a buyer of horseflesh was no better than his luck as a punter. His knowledge was not great enough to protect him against expert salesmanship, and his self-

confidence prevented him from seeking advice. His first horse, Sanders, bought in 1923, was a pleasing pet but an indifferent race-horse, and Bosambo, purchased the following year, was little better. From first to last their career was undistinguished, and in this they did not differ from their successors; but their greatest charm for Edgar lay in the fact that they made him that potent and enviable figure, a race-horse owner, and he rarely grudged the fantastic sums they cost him. They were registered in Jim's name, to her great delight, and were heavily backed to win each time they ran. Before each race he saw them in a mirage of promise, and forgot their past performance. Last time the going had been bad, the horse overhandicapped, or the jockey pig-headed. This time the animal was going to show his quality, and invariably, of course, the animal did. After the race Edgar, the poorer by several hundred pounds, would be earnestly working out a theory to account for the failure. He would never accept the explanation that they were second-rate horses for which he had paid too much money. Next time, he was certain, one of his string would win—would eventually become a classic horse, and win the Derby.

Jim, though she dutifully accepted his judgment where horses were concerned, must occasionally have felt a twinge of dismay over the performance of the animals registered in her name, but loyalty and inexperience prevented her from suspecting the truth. An occasional win in an unimportant race restored her confidence as happily as it did Edgar's, but the horses were sometimes the cause of bitter disappointments. In 1924, for instance, he had promised to take her for her first visit to America. The expenses of the trip were to be earned by Bosambo, who was going to achieve a brilliant victory at Warwick. Bosambo was heavily backed to win, and so certain was Edgar of the result of the race that as they drove down to Warwick in a hired Daimler he wrote out the telegram which

was to book their passages. Bosambo, true to form, came in last, and Jim had to swallow her disappointment.

Unlike Ivy, she was an excellent racing companion, and adapted herself perfectly to Edgar's method of enjoying himself on the course. She would study form with him on the way down in the car, smoking rapidly and making her own notes, and would wander off obediently to place her own bets when Edgar deserted her for the Press box. Her bets were always trifling, but she enjoyed the spectacle of the race, and loved to watch the horses in the paddock, where Edgar seldom bothered to come. He, from first to last, would be sitting in the high loft of the Press box, betting by telephone and "reading" the race through his glasses. They would hold a comfortable post-mortem on the day's losses on the way home.

The box at Ascot was a gesture of wild extravagance, for in 1923 Edgar was not yet in a position where he could afford to spend hundreds of pounds on showy luxuries; but the glory of being a box-holder was to be resisted no longer, and he was anxious to start working his way up through the inexorable system of seniority which rewards the subscribers of longest standing with the best boxes. At first it seemed that he had chosen an unlucky year for this extravagance, for the preceding autumn Jim had discovered, somewhat to her dismay, that she was pregnant, and was expecting to be confined only a month before Ascot. She had never been to this particular meeting, and Edgar, eagerly looking forward to the birth of the child and determined that she should celebrate her recovery by four days' racing, had applied for a box without saying anything to anybody; and a fortnight after her daughter was born arrived at the nursing home with the news that she was to enjoy Ascot in the full glory of a box-holder. Jim's feelings on the subject seem to have been mixed. She was still very weak, her doctor had forbidden her to leave the nursing home for at least another fortnight, and she had no suitable clothes; but Edgar

had set his heart on the thing, and would not listen to refusals. On the first day of Ascot he was admitted to her room by a disapproving matron, and followed by a chauffeur bearing a pyramid of boxes. He had bought her a complete toilette for each day of the meeting, not forgetting such details as stockings and gloves, and had arranged to include her physician in their Ascot party so that the scruples of that conscientious man might be respected. A party of friends had been invited, their badges bought and paid for, luncheon discussed and cases of champagne ordered. For the first time Edgar was going to lose money at Ascot in a style which befitted him.

These new grandeurs, however, by no means eclipsed his interest in the shabbier side of racing, and some time before he had been enthusiastically running a tipster business from a single room over a stable in Brick Lane, Piccadilly. The business belonged to a horse-painter of great charm and even greater plausibility whose life-story Edgar had written for *John Bull*. He was an attractive young man, known in his own profession as "Ringer" Barrie for his ability to ring the changes of disguise on race-horses, and Edgar was delighted to discover in him an intelligent and informative guide to the racing underworld who could also give him some profitable tips not wholly unconnected with "painted" horses. This mutually helpful friendship continued after the writing of the newspaper life-story, and Edgar, finding that Barrie ran a tipping business (or, as it is professionally called, a "tip lark") as a side-line, offered to take it over from him. This business, carried on in the dark room over the stable, was a revelation and a delight. Money poured in, and the most unexpected people were anxious to benefit by "Ringer" Barrie's tips. Clergymen, who "could hardly approve" of racing, and yet were willing to risk a pound for a tip in a plain envelope; maiden ladies writing from accommodation addresses and employing discreet names; husbands who wished the tips sent to their offices; wives who

had arranged to call for theirs at a shop. Edgar pored joyfully over hundreds of these letters, and carried them home. They seemed to prove that the gambling instinct was present in everyone, even in the unpromising bosoms of Nonconformist ministers, and Edgar was enthralled by this unexpected side-light on human nature. The personality and adventures, too, of "Ringer" Barrie were a never-failing interest; he was a key to the vast and complicated half-world which operates the shady side of racing. Edgar was too tolerant a man to disapprove of the "Ringer's" curious activities; if a thing was, it was probably all right—he accepted facts with the impartial interest of the good reporter. That such things were outside the law only heightened their charm, for Edgar, despite his emphatic assertions to the contrary, felt almost a schoolboy's excitement in contact with criminality. It had for him a fascination which never faded, and though he might sometimes be disappointed by the stupidity or shabbiness of the crooks he met, or because they baffled the police less consistently than the villains of his own invention, he never lost hope that he would one day encounter the master crook of his dreams, and every petty thief who knew him only as an easy "touch" was temporarily gilded by this possibility. One day, soon after he had made the acquaintance of the notorious Barrie, Edgar had travelled down to Cheltenham to visit Pat, and Barrie, intent on his own mysterious business, had been on the same train. "Whom do you think I travelled down with?" Edgar asked her triumphantly as soon as he reached the school, "—the famous Barrie himself! I suppose you've heard of him?" And Pat, somewhat coolly receiving this doubt of her literary knowledge, was further surprised to find that the celebrity in question was no mere trumpery playwright, but the very prince of horse-painters himself.

The "tip lark" association, however, lasted little more than six months, for "Ringer" Barrie had a professional reputation to

maintain, and the effect of Edgar's tips on his valued clients was very discouraging. These same clergymen, these schoolmistresses and maiden aunts who had always had such unexceptionable reasons for desiring the name of a winner, now wrote angry complaints of horses that were unplaced, of club funds and life's savings lost, and the "Ringer" had no choice but to get rid of Edgar for the sake of the business. They remained nevertheless good friends, and Edgar was certainly the richer for the experience, since in his six months' association with "Ringer" Barrie and his "tip lark" he had gathered enough material for an inexhaustible series of stories woven round the endearing figure of the Cockney tipster, Educated Evans.

During those six months, too, he had met a number of petty crooks who both interested and disappointed him. None of them was important, none wore immaculate evening dress with diamond jewellery, or escaped capture under cover of impenetrable disguise—but they had the undeniable charm of being the real thing. Little racing crooks, confidence men and part-time burglars, he considered their anecdotes worth an occasional fiver, and they in their turn were glad of the chance to spin a yarn to this almost fool-proof "touch." In his later years, solidly publicised as a writer on crime, he found himself seriously regarded as an authority on criminal matters—a reputation quite accidentally achieved. He perhaps would never have made any such claim on his own behalf, but finding the reputation presented to him ready-made, he did not contradict it, and little by little began to think of himself as a criminologist. In support of this new character, and perhaps more than half believing in it himself, he began to drop casually into his conversation references to his lifelong association with the criminal classes; he had lived, one understood, among them as a boy, knew their methods and habits, was conversant with thieves' slang, and could, if he chose, become a highly successful

amateur detective. He was fond of saying, like his own Mr. Reeder, that he had a criminal mind. None of these hints, however, had much basis in fact. The respectable Freemans might well have turned in their graves at any mention of the criminal associates of his childhood, and it seems quite certain that his experience with the man who passed "snide half-dollars" and the membership of the boys' gang which pilfered metal type had been his only youthful contacts with criminality. Such crooks as he eventually claimed among his acquaintances were certainly unknown to him before 1921, and then he cultivated them consciously, as a writer studying his material. His knowledge of thieves' slang, which was extensive, he gleaned from those furtive visitors who were always readily admitted to his study, and from the detailed vocabularies published in the *Police Journal*, to which, through some round-about channel, he was a subscriber.

Though inclined to exaggerate his personal knowledge of criminals, he was reluctant to admit that they ever supplied him with material for stories, and remained always absurdly sensitive on this point. Certainly it is unlikely that the "old lags" he knew supplied him with ready-made plots, since the adventures in his crime novels follow their course on a high plane of fantasy, far removed from the mediocre experiences of the crooks he knew, who were always small men, usually hard up, earning a dishonest living with some difficulty; but that he picked up scraps of useful information and wove them into his stories is undeniable. It would have shown a strange professional asceticism on his part if he had not, and the evolution of the *Educated Evans* books from "Ringer" Barrie's "tip lark" is an illustration of the sound profit he made on experience. Nevertheless, perhaps from vanity, perhaps from a genuine disappointment in the smallness and shabbiness of these real-life crooks, he often protested with unnecessary vigour that they had never supplied him with a single idea. They were all too

stupid, he would say, to think of anything cleverer than to touch him for a fiver. They fell so far below his conception of a master criminal that he refused them credit for any intelligence at all. Yet they were not always so stupid according to their lights, as the story of the "hot" curtains—the truth of which Edgar failed to suspect for many years—ironically shows.

About 1922 a valuable pair of curtains was stolen from a nobleman's palace in Brussels, and smuggled into England in the luggage of a broad-minded jockey. Arrived in London the jockey, suddenly nervous, passed them on to a friend, and this friend was a little crook well known to Edgar. Since the police were by now aware that the stolen curtains were in London, the thief found himself deeply embarrassed by their possession, and hit on a quick and easy method of hiding them. He made them up into a parcel and took them at once round to Clarence Gate Gardens. "Edgar," he said, "you've been a good friend to me, and I'd like to do something for you." He then told a plausible story about a pair of nice old curtains which had belonged to his mother, and wound up the tale by making Edgar a present of them. Edgar was touched by this evidence of unexpected gratitude, received the curtains graciously, and had them hung in the drawing-room, where they were much admired. A few weeks later, however, having quarrelled with his tame thief, in a fit of anger he packed them up and returned them. The thief's alarm was considerable, for the curtains were stolen, or, as he professionally expressed it, "hot," and the police were already questioning known receivers. Afraid that they would be found in his possession, and having at the moment no other convenient place to hide them, he took the parcel back to Edgar's flat, and with tears in his eyes apologised for his part in the quarrel, begging Edgar to show his forgiveness by taking back the gift. Edgar was deeply affected, and shook him by the hand. "That's the way I like to hear you talk," he said,

genuinely admiring the generosity of the fellow, who, crook though he might be, so obviously had his heart in the right place, "—I dare say I was to blame. We'll say no more about it." And the curtains once more lent their rich distinction to the drawing-room. By the time that the hue and cry had died down the crook, who was doing rather well, decided to cut his losses and let Edgar keep them: a few years later he told him the whole story. He knew his man well enough to guess that Edgar would be neither shocked nor annoyed, but would appreciate the joke at his own expense. "You bastard!" he said, amused, and then, considering the curtains—"ah well, they're very pretty."

The five years following his marriage to Jim were, beyond any doubt, the happiest of his life. He was working hard, he was beginning to make money, and his mind was not fretted by the strain and unhappiness which shadowed his later years. Emotionally he was at peace, and satisfied to find that his life at last was going in the right direction. He had achieved many things that he could be proud of, and if his greatest ambition—success in the theatre—still remained unrealised, when he considered his origins and beginnings his present success seemed little less than a miracle. He had started with nothing, and now he had everything, short of great riches and fame as a playwright, that he had ever wanted; and in the fullness of time, perhaps, those too would come. He was happy in his marriage, and felt a glow of pride when he considered the advantages he had given his children. Bryan was at Cambridge, studying engineering and destined for the army, and the army for him would not mean the hard, foot-slogging life his father had known, but would be smoothed by a private income and a commission. Pat had enjoyed her four years at Cheltenham, and now was to be sent to a finishing school in Paris. Michael, still a little boy who spent most of his time with his mother, would eventually follow his brother to Oundle, and satisfy the

needs of his charming and studious nature. And, as if this were not enough, Jim had given him a daughter who, in features and temperament, promised to be a clear reflection of her father. Life was very full and deeply satisfying, and the only grief which marred this happy period was the reawakening of old affection and self-reproach by the death of Ivy.

For the last few years she had lived in Tunbridge Wells, accepting the placid life of that quiet town and keeping her lonely unhappiness to herself. Michael spent part of his school holidays with her, and Bryan always stayed with her during vacations, but apart from the visits of her children she was much alone. Her meetings with Edgar were few and brief, and generally took place abroad, when she took Michael to join the others for the Christmas holiday. They would meet, talk in a friendly, faintly embarrassed fashion, and part again. Michael would be carried off to winter sports at Caux, and Ivy would make her slow and aimless way home.

In the winter of 1925 she faced the ordeal of meeting with some misgiving. She was not well, had been conscious for some time of a pain in her breast, and the weariness of the future was beginning to depress her. She dreaded the contact with the family party, full of themselves and their own high-spirited enjoyment; dreaded the spectacle of success which Edgar's second marriage so obviously presented, and the bitter and inevitable reaction of the parting. Nevertheless it was her usual practice to accompany Michael to Switzerland and hand him over to Edgar at a pre-arranged point, and this winter she had no valid reason for not doing so. She travelled to the Swiss border with the boy, arriving the day before Christmas Eve, and waited on the station for the Simplon–Orient express. The train came in, lighted and hilariously crowded, and full of the winter-sports atmosphere of excitement and pleasure. Edgar and Jim, Bryan, Pat and their friends jumped down to the frosty platform. The usual greetings were exchanged, the usual

platitudes spoken, and everybody wished Ivy a happy Christmas. The train waited long enough for the old embarrassed constraint to make itself felt, and then steamed out in the darkness on the long climb into the mountains.

Alone on the platform, Ivy was seized with a nameless despair such as she had never known. She could not stay where she was, yet there was nowhere in the world where she wished to go. She spent Christmas Eve in a state bordering on hysteria, wandering helplessly about in local trains. The pain in her left breast was getting worse, and at length, in some town in France, she consulted a doctor. He made an examination, asked a few questions, and became professionally grave. Where was her home, her family? It was imperative that she should have an immediate operation. He did not say and Ivy did not ask what was the matter with her. They discussed her case with the paralysed discretion which follows the discovery of cancer.

Back in Tunbridge Wells Ivy wrote to Edgar, with conventional understatement, explaining the necessity for an operation. It would be expensive, she feared, but the doctor had said this and that, and apparently it had to be done. Her letter was comparatively cheerful, and she hoped they would not let it spoil their holiday. Edgar was disturbed, but not more deeply than her letter warranted, and was happy to think that all could be made well by a substantial cheque.

The operation, like so many of its kind, at first appeared successful, and Ivy, her fears allayed, began to look forward dimly to convalescence. But within a few months the pain had returned, and this time it could not be ignored. A second operation, she was told, was unfortunately necessary, and once more she wrote apologetically for money. Edgar, with no idea of the real nature of her malady, replied kindly from London, more than half convinced in his own mind that the doctor was frightening her. He sent a cheque and wrote almost daily, but

his horror of physical suffering made him reluctant to visit her. After all, she would probably be all right. Women made mountains out of mole-hills when it came to sickness, and a visit from him would probably upset her.

It was Bryan, urgently summoned from Catterick by the doctor, who broke the news to his father that Ivy was dying. There was no hope at all of her recovery; she had suffered a great deal, and it was impossible to tell how long she might linger; it might be days, it might equally well be months. Even then Edgar's unwillingness to see her suffer stayed his hand. She might be unconscious; she might not know him; and if she did, would it not be giving more pain than comfort to burden her last hours with sorry farewells? He stayed in London, miserable and irresolute, and Bryan and Pat went to Tunbridge Wells alone.

The death of Ivy shattered Edgar as no other grief had done. His life, his "very happy life" bitterly reproached him now, since he had so much, and Ivy, whom he had once loved, had had so little. Yet perhaps after all she had spoken the truth when she said that their parting had been inevitable. They had been people from different worlds, with nothing to bridge the gulf between them but the flimsy structure of youthful falling in love. Lacking a miracle, their marriage had been doomed to failure; one could even marvel that it had lasted so long. And if his own nature, powerful, ambitious, self-centred, had made that failure more bitter for Ivy than it need have been, it had come to an end at last. She suffered no more, and in time even her gentle affectionate image would cease to reproach him, and memory be softened by understanding and peace.

Considering these things, and even, perhaps, as a symbol of compassionate repentance, he comforted himself by composing an inscription for a memorial to be put up in Rosebank Methodist Chapel, where, twenty-four years before, they had been married. "To the memory of Ivy Maude Wallace

(Caldecott)," he wrote, "daughter of the Rev. W. Shaw Caldecott and beloved wife of Edgar Wallace. . . . She was the first bride to be married in this Chapel." But Ivy's sister, to whom he sent the suggested inscription, knew better than he the temper of the Methodist conscience; knew also how delicate were the feelings of Caldecott relations on the subject of unhappy marriages and the scandal of divorce. It would wound their tenderest sensibilities to see a reminder of such things on the very wall of the chapel where they worshipped, and she advised him to wait a year or two before considering it. The rough draft of the inscription was regretfully put away among the yellowed love-letters which Ivy had kept for nearly thirty years, and here, with her childish diary and music certificates, her carefully tied bundles of letters and telegrams and the box which had once contained her engagement ring, it was eventually forgotten.

In a way it was particularly bitter that Ivy should have died just then, for, having loved him and helped him through the difficult years of struggle, she would, though estranged, have rejoiced in his great success; and the beginning of that great success was in the year she died. Ever since the failure of *M'Lady* Edgar had been doggedly writing plays, and sending them, though without result, the round of the London managers. Now, in the early summer of 1926, he had written a play which had obvious possibilities, and he had even managed to interest Gerald du Maurier. His first meeting with the great actor-manager had had its element of absurdity. Edgar had written a sensational article in the *London Mail* on the subject of sexual perversion, and had called it "The Canker in Our Midst." It was a blustering, intolerant, kick-the-blighters-down-stairs kind of article, perfectly in keeping with Edgar's witch-burning attitude towards this difficult subject, and in particular it appeared to make accusations against several people well known in the world of the theatre. Gerald du Maurier read this

article and was shocked by its brutality; it had been dictated—so it seemed to him—by the kind of mentality which makes lynching possible, and his disgust at the libellous attack on the people in question drove him to telephone the writer of the article to tell him what he thought of him. He was nonplussed by Edgar's steady voice on the telephone: "I hoped you'd ring up," said Edgar; "of course, you've had my letter?" Du Maurier had received none, and, taken aback by this friendly counter-attack, learned from Edgar that a letter was awaiting him at Wyndham's Theatre. A little awkwardly, with everything left unsaid, the two men agreed to meet for luncheon the following day. Du Maurier went to the appointment with the full intention of speaking his mind about the *London Mail* article, Edgar with an equally clear plan of interesting du Maurier in a projected play. Both fenced for an opening, and du Maurier's antagonism gradually melted under the calm, faintly arrogant charm of the other man—a man who was utterly unlike his preconceived idea of the writer of the hateful article, a man in whom, for all his obvious self-esteem, he shrewdly detected a hidden and vulnerable sensitivity. Here was a man, he told himself, whom he could grow to like and understand—a curious blend of depth and shallowness, weakness and power. It was even possible that he had in him the makings of a playwright, despite the Playhouse fiasco of five years ago, and he found himself listening with detached interest to the outline of the police melodrama which Wallace was so confidently promising to finish within the next few days. The complicated plot had possibilities, though the principal part—that of a disguised criminal, whose identity is not revealed until the last—could obviously not be played by himself, since he would be bound to draw the suspicions of the audience and give away the secret.

The idea, nevertheless, was an exciting one, and the only criticism he made was of the title. Edgar had intended calling

it *The Gaunt Stranger*, since the plot was taken from his novel of that name, but du Maurier found this title uninspiring. He knew at once that Edgar had hit on the right one with his second suggestion. Box-office appeal rang as clear as a bell in the syllables of *The Ringer*.

Part Four

THE PHENOMENON

CHAPTER I

Money and Power

IN Gerald du Maurier Edgar found what he had always needed—an experienced theatrical adviser. His knowledge of the theatre, his long experience as actor, manager and producer, and his artist's sensitivity to the pulse of a play, perfectly fitted him to guide Edgar past the pitfalls into which he had previously fallen, and which had made his first two productions such disastrous failures. No amount of sitting through rehearsals, listening to actors and counting laughs, could teach him the essential secrets of economy, pungency, and logical construction; but with du Maurier as mentor he developed rapidly from untutored experimentalist into playwright. Du Maurier was a skilful "play doctor," and the final script of *The Ringer* bore only a family resemblance to the drama which Edgar had written at top speed after their first conversation. The play was revised and tightened, and considerably altered during rehearsals at du Maurier's suggestion, with the result that *The Ringer*, as presented at Wyndham's Theatre on May 1st, 1926, was a well-knit melodrama, clearly constructed and economically written, and entirely free of those dangerous "loose ends" which so often weaken the conclusion of a complicated plot. Into this carefully balanced mechanical framework, the secret of which he never again forgot, Edgar was able to set those ingredients of mystery and suspense in which he excelled, and to humanise the melodramatic improbabilities of his theme (the old stand-by of the disguised criminal for whom everybody is hunting, and who turns out to be a charming and influential official at Scotland

Yard) by shrewd touches of expert Cockney comedy. Indeed, it is for Sam Hackitt, the white-livered Cockney burglar, played with a superb grudging whine by Gordon Harker, that one chiefly remembers *The Ringer* with such affection. In the creation of such characters Wallace was undeniably at his best, and they fitted the genius of Harker like a glove. Harker's Sam Hackitt in *The Ringer*, his Detective-Sergeant Totty in *The Case of the Frightened Lady*, and his offensive criminal butler in *The Calendar* are the purest and funniest comedy that Wallace ever wrote.

With Edgar at his elbow, avidly learning his new trade, du Maurier put *The Ringer* into rehearsal at Wyndham's Theatre with an all-star cast—Leslie Banks, Nigel Bruce, Gordon Harker, Franklin Dyall, Leslie Faber and Dorothy Dickson. In the hands of six such accomplished artistes even a mediocre play would have had a chance of success, and *The Ringer*, as finally produced, was in the first rank of its particular *genre*. It lacked the biting economy and characterisation of *On the Spot*, and is less gripping, because more mechanical, than *The Case of the Frightened Lady*, but it still remains one of Wallace's best and most successful melodramas.

On the first night, however, it seemed that even du Maurier's production and the attractions of an all-star cast might not counteract the sudden paralysis of the coal strike, which was declared on the day before *The Ringer* was due to open. In the general strike which followed three days later public transport, on which the greater part of every audience depends, was at a standstill: there were no newspapers, and consequently no advertising. If bad luck could kill a play, then *The Ringer* was doomed, and Edgar, who had already known the bitterness of two unredeemed failures in the theatre, went to his first night in an agony of nervous apprehension. "The man who writes a play which does not 'get across,' " he wrote several months later, "requires little or no crushing. There is nothing quite so.

ghastly as to wake up in the morning and read a succession of bad notices in the newspapers—it is the bleakest experience which can fall to any man who writes for his living. For months his hopes and ambitions have been centred upon this child of his; he has watched it develop in the hands of the producer, and has gone to the theatre for the first night full of faith. And halfway through the evening, or probably before, his heart begins to sink. Instinctively he knows that this *tour de force* of his has, in some way, failed to realise his rosy hopes."

On the first night of *The Ringer*, however, his heart had no excuse to sink, and long before the final curtain it was borne in on him that the theatrical ambition which had haunted him all his life had at last been realised. It was thirty years since he had sat, bright-eyed and breathless, in the gallery of the Prince of Wales's, and heard Arthur Roberts sing his popular song; thirty years since he had first wildly dreamed of fame in the theatre, the dream with which Alice Marriott, Richard Edgar and Polly Richards had been familiar all their lives, and which ran its hereditary course in his own blood. It had been a long time to wait, but now that the dream had at last become reality he recognised his satisfaction as something far deeper than the pleasure of any other kind of success. He had wanted the theatre always, with a nostalgia which he had never entirely understood, and now, at the age of fifty-one, he had at last come home.

"If I had my way," he had written to his publisher only six months before, "I would give up writing books. I write them much too quickly for the comfort of any publisher. That is the only way I can write them. . . . If I can only get my plays to go, I will give up writing books. This is my solemn promise to you. God knows how many more you will get before Christmas!" And now, after the first night of *The Ringer*, he was writing again—but this time in the unfamiliar character of a successful playwright.

"My dear Ernest,—

"What a luck bringer you are! Your gorgeous flowers bucked me up tremendously—it was such a lovely idea that I almost feel that there must have been a woman behind the thought. The play was a tremendous success—I have never had such a personal reception. Coal strike or no coal strike, this 'drammer' looks like lasting out the crisis."

The "drammer" played to excellent business for a year, and established him in the front rank of popular dramatists. He drew about £7,000 in royalties, half of which he insisted on making over to du Maurier in recognition of his responsibility for the play's success, so that *The Ringer* cannot be said to have made his financial fortune; but it paved the way for that fortune more surely and rapidly than anything else had done. His book sales boomed, and managers who before the production of *The Ringer* had returned the scripts of his plays with polite regrets now regarded him with a fresh and speculative eye, and were more than willing to listen to his suggestions. Film companies began to woo him, and actors to regard him as a man to be flattered and cajoled. His life changed, gilded for the first time by appreciable prosperity, and coloured by the flattering promise of future success. How ardently he responded to that promise may be judged from the fact that the next six years saw the production of no fewer than seventeen of his plays, and the profits which flowed into his hands during those years were not far short of £100,000.

The history of those six years in the theatre, however, was not one of uninterrupted triumph; indifferent successes and spectacular failures chequered his progress, to be swept aside with his old stoical indifference to defeat while he hammered his way to an overwhelming volume of production. Having once laid his hand on the theatre, ambition and temperament made it impossible for him to be satisfied with half-measures;

he had found the medium which most perfectly suited his confident and erratic genius, and he attacked it with inhuman energy from then until the year of his death.

During the first nine months of the run of *The Ringer* he produced no new play, but by the Christmas of 1926 he was already restlessly considering a second melodrama to take its place. At Caux, where he still spent his annual holiday with increasing extravagance, surrounding himself with parties of friends and spending money on a scale hitherto impossible, he had had long discussions with Bertie Meyer, the theatrical manager, and at his suggestion wrote, in the course of five nervous and preoccupied days, a play for Mary Glynne and Denis Neilson-Terry. The character of the play, which was to be called *The Terror*, was closer to the style of his "mystery thriller" novels than any other, and, for all its financial success, cannot compare with his best plays. In writing it he seems to have played for safety in employing all the well-worn devices of his most popular serials, and the result is unconvincing and artificial. All the familiar ingredients are there—the old mysterious house built over hidden dungeons, the master criminal disguised as the mildest character in the play, the super-detective masquerading as a drunken ne'er-do-well, the hidden treasure in the vault, the hooded figure appearing on moonlit nights and leaving a trail of murder in its wake, the shrieking heroine trapped in the dungeon with a sinister madman. Shots and screams, corpses, apparitions and claw-like hands appearing round slowly opening doors were introduced to keep the audience in a state of shivering suspense, and must have succeeded, however artificially, for the play, when produced in its spiritual home, the Lyceum, ran profitably for nearly seven months. It had been modestly financed by Edgar himself, Bertie Meyer and Denis Neilson-Terry, who between them had raised a capital of £1,000, and since it made a profit of £35,000 nobody, presumably, had any cause for

complaint. The play nevertheless is an artificial and old-fashioned thriller, and was never one of Edgar's favourites; in less than a year he had gone back to the more congenial style of modern Scotland Yard melodrama, and was himself preparing the production of *The Squeaker*.

The intervening twelve months, however, had not been idle; they had seen the production of *The Yellow Mask* (a musical play of which Edgar had supplied the criminal framework, produced by Julian Wylie to open the new Carlton Theatre) and an experimental play in which he tried to break away from the conventions of police drama, and which was a disheartening failure.

The Man Who Changed His Name depends for its excitement on a long series of improbable coincidences. A young wife, somewhat nervously engaged in a love-affair with a fortune-hunter, accidentally discovers that her husband, some years before his marriage, had changed his name. She is his second wife, and her nervousness is increased by the discovery (also accidental) that a man bearing his original name, and belonging to her husband's home town in Canada, was tried for the murder of his wife, her lover, and his mother-in-law—the reason for the crime being his suspicions of his wife's fidelity. The murderer has since escaped and disappeared, and since his name, age and birthplace are all identical with her husband's, she concludes that he is the missing murderer, and in terror begins to watch for signs of his intention to murder her lover and herself. Her husband meanwhile, by coincidence after coincidence, gives them both the impression that he is planning their destruction, and it is only when it is finally (and accidentally) revealed that he is not the murderer at all, and only changed his name to avoid being confused with a known criminal, that the wife breathes freely, dismisses her lover, and seeks forgiveness in her husband's arms. In spite of the play's weaknesses, which arise from the basic unreality of the plot,

Robert Loraine became sufficiently interested in it to wish to play the principal part, and went into partnership with Wallace, to whom he made over his lease of the Apollo Theatre at a rental of £450 a week.

It was not a congenial partnership. Loraine, an actor of great talent and dominant temper, was too forceful a personality to run smoothly in harness with so self-opinionated a man as Edgar Wallace, and when the play was coolly received by an audience which had gone to the theatre expecting a crime play of the calibre of *The Ringer* or *The Terror*, each angrily blamed the failure on the other.

"MY DEAR BOB," Edgar wrote to Loraine after the third night.

> "If there are many more like last night's performance this play is going to run about two months. Last night's presentation of *The Man Who Changed His Name* was like an amateur performance played by the inmates of a lunatic asylum. Every laugh was killed stone dead; every actor raced through his part as though he had a train to catch. This is not 'pace,' it is sheer wicked stupidity. . . .
>
> "The play can only be a success if it is played as a farce and played for laughs. I don't know how you regard it, as a vehicle for yourself or as a money-maker. I am so keen on the commercial side of this play that I didn't even bother to make your part supreme. Every actor in the cast is as important as the other, and unless there is perfect team work then you are going to lose one of the best propositions in London. . . .
>
> "Every laugh in this play is £100 in your pocket; every laugh that is killed takes about that amount off the play's value. I don't care a damn who scores in this play. It is not a Robert Loraine play. It is a Robert Loraine business proposition. If you shine above all the other members of

the cast, then the play must be a failure, because it is not written for a star; it is written so that it may go round the provinces for a couple of years and be for you a steady source of income.

"The intervals between the acts are far too short. The play finished at 10.25 last night. There must be at least 8 minutes. It is heart-breaking to see a success strangled at its birth, and that is just what is happening. There will not be a second *Man Who Changed His Name*. It is to my mind not only a fine vehicle for the actor, but it is a commercial proposition which has no equal in London at the moment.

"Believe me, my dear Robert, I have never made a mistake about the run of a play. I am wishing you a big financial success, but all the wishes in the world will not save that play coming off somewhere about May 19th."

Robert Loraine, pardonably angered by such a letter from a man of so much less theatrical experience than himself, replied more formally but with no less rancour:

"DEAR WALLACE,—

"It is no use being upset by the notices—you ought to know that. But although *The Man Who Changed His Name* has played to nearly as much money as my last revival of Cyrano in its first five performances this is attributable mainly to the temporary glamour of your name; it is no use disguising the fact that the play does not send the audience away satisfied.

"The reason is not that the play is bad, but because:

"a) The end is abrupt and inconclusive.

"b) The play is too short for a full evening's entertainment.

"c) Your suggestion of acting slowly and prolonging the intervals is absurd

"d) Your inexperienced and uncertain direction has given the performance an unsure touch which blurs the situations and robs them of their full effect.

"These defects could be remedied if it were not for your colossal self-complacence of which I warned you at the last rehearsals, and your insistence on taking full control of the production. Dual control is rarely satisfactory, and with two such people as you and me it is impracticable; that is why I submitted the whole enterprise to your dictation and responsibility.

"Your expressions of complete satisfaction with your result, before the first performance, reassured me to some extent, because I had confidence in your judgment. The result has shown that my confidence was pathetically misplaced.

"From considerations of personal affection and esteem, I am ignoring your letter of Sunday. It is the kindest thing to do, and I feel sure you would not have written it if you were quite in your senses . . . I am afraid your optimistic hope of a two months' run will be sadly disappointed.

"It is a blow to me, as I hoped for at least a short respite from rehearsals; whereas I am now, of course, compelled to go right ahead with my new production."

After such a candid exchange a breach was inevitable. Edgar instantly offered to buy back his partner's share in the production, and Loraine, by no means unwilling to sever his connection with a play which he felt was doomed to failure, agreed to sell and immediately left the cast. *The Man Who Changed His Name* had been running for exactly a week. A hasty meeting of accountants, auditors and solicitors was called, at which Edgar—unwilling, perhaps, to meet Loraine face to face—was represented by his wife. Frantic rehearsals were begun with a new American actor, Hartley Power, in the leading part,

and directed personally by Edgar, who was determined to prove that the play was capable of success. Unfortunately for him, it suffered a heavier blow with the loss of Robert Loraine than he would acknowledge, and after dragging on unprofitably for another five weeks he was compelled to take it off and admit failure.

It was a blow to his pride, and Loraine's accusation of "inexperienced and uncertain direction" bitterly rankled—the more so since he was on the point of producing a new police melodrama, *The Squeaker*, himself, and was taking his work as co-producer with Campbell Gullan with great seriousness. He was certain that no one, with the possible exception of du Maurier, could produce his plays as well as he could himself, and, however inexperienced and uncertain he may have been in *The Man Who Changed His Name*, in the production of *The Squeaker* he undoubtedly developed a strong ability to direct, and had the satisfaction of seeing his faith in himself justified. Whether he would have made a good producer of any plays but his own is doubtful: his knowledge of the drama was narrow, and his interest in other playwrights' work perfunctory: his theatre-going was, in these last six years of his life, confined almost entirely to the first nights of his own plays. But with these plays and with his own characters he developed a sure touch; he knew exactly what he wanted, and was shrewd and patient in his methods of getting it. He had learned to understand the difficulties of the actor, and from long study had formed a sound idea of the demands of the popular audience. With a play which he knew in his heart to be of his best quality (such as *The Calendar* and *On The Spot*) his direction was bold, practical and essentially dramatic. It was only when the play itself was indifferent that he faltered.

The Squeaker was the kind of play he thoroughly enjoyed, and he pleased himself and his Fleet Street friends by making one of the chief characters a newspaper reporter who neither flourished

a note-book nor licked a pencil. Most newspapermen are sensitive on the subject of note-books, which are as much a part of the stage reporter's equipment as the knee-bending gesture is of the stage policeman's, and Edgar was anxious to make his reporter true to life. "The first scene is in a newspaper office," he told an interviewer during rehearsals, "and arising out of that I have struck a blow for my former profession. The reporter in the play is asked: 'Where's your note-book?' and he replies: 'I don't carry one. Only gas inspectors carry note-books.' The audience will have the opportunity—oh, so rare!—of seeing a stage reporter who is true to life."

Whether or not Colley, the humorous Scots reporter of *The Squeaker*, is true to life, he is an endearing character, and so anxious was Edgar that the actor playing the part should have a just appreciation of his type that he took him down to the *News of the World* office and made him study the frenzied professional activity of Saturday night. He also gave himself further opportunity for his favourite type of broad comedy in the character of a Cockney doorman in the disreputable Leopard Club, where more goes on, needless to say, than meets the eye. The play ran successfully to the end of the Apollo lease which he had bought from Loraine, and was then immediately transferred to the Shaftesbury Theatre. It ran altogether for six months, and made a handsome profit; more than enough to justify the Rolls-Royce (smaller than his own cream-coloured Rolls, but still an opulent vehicle) which he had given to Jim as a dramatic first-night present. Her share in his theatrical ventures was by this time a practical one, for since the day when she had represented him at the meeting with Robert Loraine he had put the whole of his theatrical business in her hands, and took a child-like delight in referring to her as his manager. At the time she had been both ignorant and inexperienced in all stage matters, but she was a shrewd and capable businesswoman, as Edgar well knew, and he guessed

that she would soon learn the routine of theatrical management, and would keep his interests at heart more completely than would have been possible with a professional manager. Jim, herself, though intimidated at first, threw herself into the work with great earnestness, and before long was engaging casts, arranging salaries, renting theatres and organising tours in the provinces. It was a job for which she was particularly well fitted, for she possessed the hard-headed common sense which Edgar lacked, and for some time had been wishing for a suitable outlet for her practical energies. The heavy secretarial work involved in his play and book production was her province no longer, though she still took her turn at the typewriter in times of crisis, when even Curtis and the assistant secretary were unable to cope with the volume of some prodigious assignment; housekeeping, since prosperity had taken them from Clarence Gate Gardens to a £1,600 a year flat in Portland Place, with a large staff of servants, was no longer a burden—a release for which she made no secret of being thankful; and her baby, Penelope, was already growing up into a self-possessed child whose practical care was undertaken by governesses and nurses. By nature a hard worker, she was anxious for a constructive occupation, and in undertaking the business side of her husband's plays satisfied both her practical instincts and her natural ambition. She quickly found herself, as she mastered her job, in a position of some power, for the casting of plays, the management of the theatre and the booking of tours were left entirely in her hands. She had the pleasure of seeing "Mrs. Edgar Wallace presents . . ." on every play-bill and programme of Edgar's plays; she was a person of consequence behind the scenes and in the manager's office, and she enjoyed her real, if unspectacular, responsibilities. She had no wish to share the blazing limelight which her husband loved, since she was fully conscious that she had neither the flair nor the personality to do it justice. She was happiest when left to enjoy

her own authority in the protective cover of Edgar's massive shadow.

Within a week of the opening of *The Squeaker* he followed it with *The Flying Squad* at the Lyceum—another typical crime-detection play which ran for six months and proved itself a money-maker. It had been tried out several weeks before at a suburban theatre, when *The Yellow Mask* and *The Man Who Changed His Name* were both running, and Edgar had celebrated the event with a lavish supper party to the members of all three casts at the Carlton Hotel, enchanted to find himself in the unique position of a playwright who could claim three simultaneous London productions. Such tangible evidence of popularity was very sweet. He had only to break the ice with one success, it seemed, for him to have half a dozen. In two years he had had six plays produced on the London stage, and of those only one had been a financial failure. Such a record might well have unbalanced the judgment of a modest man, and Edgar, to whom theatrical success was pure intoxication, began to listen to the inner promptings of a self-confidence which told him he was infallible.

It is perhaps not surprising that his next play should have been a failure—still less so that he should have refused to admit its faults. Some time before, he had met Billy Merson, and had been interested by the comedian's ambition to star in a straight role. The result of this interest was a hastily written comedy called *The Lad*, which is undoubtedly one of the worst plays he ever produced. He seems, in writing it, to have been hypnotised by Merson's music-hall and pantomime reputation, for he committed the fatal error of creating a leading part which had no more relation to the rest of the play than an interpolated vaudeville act, and tried to play into the comedian's hands with humour which would scarcely have done credit to a suburban pantomime. The play was unsuitably cast and hastily rehearsed, and sent out on what was intended to be a profitable

tour of the provinces. A play which had to be confined to the provinces, however, fell far below Edgar's ideas of the value of his work, and when *The Squeaker* came to the end of its run at the Shaftesbury nothing would do but that the new comedy must be brought to London. Bill Linnit, Edgar's business manager and Jim's second-in-command, was sent up to Manchester, where *The Lad* was showing a profit of £150 a week, with instructions to report on it as a possibility for the Shaftesbury, but his too candid criticisms evoked nothing more constructive than an autocratic display of bad temper. The play was immediately brought to London and opened at the Shaftesbury on Christmas Eve, several days after Edgar, Jim, the children and a party of friends had left for Switzerland. Bill Linnit was left behind in London to report on its reception.

Christmas Eve and Boxing Day audiences, in a pantomime frame of mind, received the play more warmly than it deserved, and Billy Merson himself telegraphed to Edgar that the play was a wonderful success. Bill Linnit's private report, which was less encouraging, produced nothing but a shower of angry telegrams from Caux. Edgar was convinced that *The Lad* was going to be one of his greatest successes, and instructed Linnit to send scripts off at once to Berlin and New York, and to open negotiations for German and American production. The critical paralysis which occasionally numbed his judgment seems to have blinded him completely to the miserable quality of the play, and he had no qualms, in spite of damning Press notices, over risking his reputation abroad by the production of so mediocre a comedy. Fortunately for him, however, no German or American manager wished to produce it; London audiences sighed, yawned and stayed away, and within three weeks the Shaftesbury Theatre was empty.

During a brief visit to Berlin, before he went to Switzerland, he had been writing a new play, and this time on a subject which really interested him—racing. Five months before he had taken

part in a friendly test action in the Chancery Division, in the hope of bringing about a reform in the Rules of Racing, and the details of the action had suggested a theme for a racing play centring in Ascot. The idea had simmered in his mind for several months, and now, hearing that Gerald du Maurier was looking for a new production, he had shut himself up in his hotel sitting-room to write *The Calendar*.

The law suit had been a particularly interesting one, and the appeal against the decision of Mr. Justice Clauson (who had given judgment in favour of Edgar against the Stewards of the Jockey Club) was still pending. It had long been an anomaly in the racing world that a horse entered for a classic race was automatically scratched if its owner died before the race was run. This rule had resulted in several famous horses being debarred from classic races for which they had been entered, and the reason for it lay in the somewhat complicated matter of forfeiture fees, which by long usage were regarded as a gaming debt, and therefore not recoverable by law. It being the practice to pay part of the entrance fee for a classic race some considerable time before the event, and the rest at the time of the race or shortly after, the Gaming Act (which laid down that debts incurred in gaming were not legally recoverable) prevented the Jockey Club from recovering the unpaid portion of the fees from the estate of an owner who had died before the race. A living owner was, of course, in honour bound to complete the payment, even if his horse were scratched before the race, in which case the fees became forfeit; but since these forfeits were held to be not recoverable by law from the estate of a dead owner, the Jockey Club in self-defence had instituted the rule that a horse whose owner died before the race must automatically be debarred from running.

The whole difficulty lay in the established precedent that gaming debts were not legally recoverable, and in the hope of correcting this anomaly in the case of racing forfeits by putting

it to the test, Edgar had arranged with the Stewards of the Jockey Club that he would deliberately default, and that they should sue him. Accordingly, he had entered one of his horses, Master Michael, in two races at Newmarket First Spring Meeting, but had not run him. He was thus liable to a forfeit of £4, which he refused to pay, and, announcing that he intended to plead the Gaming Act to exonerate himself from the debt, invited the Jockey Club to take legal action. The case had been heard before Mr. Justice Clauson, who, to the dismay of everyone concerned, had held that racing entrance fees were part of a contract "by way of gaming and wagering," and therefore came under the Gaming Act of 1845, and were not recoverable by law. Edgar had won the case which he had hoped to lose, and was deeply disgusted. However, shortly before he left for Switzerland, an appeal against the judgment had been entered, and he was waiting anxiously for the result.

With his mind so closely occupied with the case, it was not surprising that he should find in it the nucleus of a play, and when Sir Gerald du Maurier mentioned to him that he was looking for a new vehicle, set to work to construct it. The theme of *The Calendar* is a combination of this idea and his old favourite parable of the monkey and the gourd. The hero, a race-horse owner who is in desperate financial straits, in a moment of weakness decides to have his horse "pulled" in the Ascot Stakes, since there is another horse in the race which is almost certain to beat it; the idea being that when it is entered for its next race, from which the dangerous rival will be absent, it will start at an artificially long price, and he will make a fortune. Unfortunately, with the impulsiveness to which heroes are prone, he writes a note to a certain Lady Panniford, with whom he is in love, warning her of his intentions, so that she shall not back his horse in the Ascot Stakes. Lady Panniford, however, is the villain of the piece, a grasping, miserly beauty who thinks of nothing but money, and when the hero thinks

better of his dishonest plan, and sends her a further note to say so, written in indelible pencil on the back of a £100 note, she locks up this valuable message in her private safe. The hero's horse comes in second to its rival, and Lady Panniford, having meanwhile quarrelled with the hero and made up her mind to ruin him, takes the first, and incriminating, note, and lays information against him to the Stewards of the Jockey Club, in the hope of getting him warned off the turf—an unwomanly design in which she is at first successful. But—and this is where the two themes meet to solve the plot—news is received that the owner of the winning horse had died abroad just before the race, a development which automatically makes the hero's horse the winner, and removes any suspicion of the animal having been "pulled"; and Lady Panniford, who, as a monkey-and-gourd character, has kept the £100 note (bearing evidence of the hero's second thoughts), being equally incapable of either spending it or returning it, has it neatly burgled from her by the hero, who in the course of the play has lost his chivalrous illusions.

The Calendar is undoubtedly one of Wallace's best plays, for on this ingenious plot he built a structure of amusing and authentic racing detail (with which no one was more familiar than he) and provided the incomparable Gordon Harker with another made-to-measure part in the character of a burglar turned butler, who has the rude habit of attracting the attention of guests by hissing at them. The scene of the enquiry in the Stewards' Room at Ascot is a gem of its kind, on a level with the police court scene in *The Flying Squad*; it was a proceeding with which his work as a racing journalist had made him familiar (just as his reporting days had taught him all there was to know about the pathos, squalor and humour of the East-End police court) and with the type of men whom he really knew—jockeys, trainers, stewards and bookmakers—his touch was both sure and human. He was justifiably pleased with his

new drama, and sent it off to du Maurier in the hope that he would produce it and play the hero. Du Maurier, however, had already decided on another play, and wrote to Edgar at Caux to make his apologies.

> "DEAR OLD EDGAR,—
>
> "I have got myself into such awful trouble lately with authors promising to do their plays and then not doing them that I shall soon be cut by the county . . . In the meantime, what we consider a very good play has come to hand, which can go straight into rehearsal, and I think that to be the wisest thing to do. I think you are an extraordinary brick, seeing that I was in a hole, to gallop the play through for me the way you did, and I am tremendously grateful, but then you are a very great friend in need."

This letter, seemingly unimportant in itself, was later to form an essential link of evidence in the bizarre lawsuit which followed the production of *The Calendar*.

The appeal against the forfeits case decision was allowed the following February, and the judgment reversed. The Jockey Club revised its rules, and Edgar was well satisfied. By the time that *The Calendar* was produced, seven months later, part of its theme was therefore out of date, but as the disqualifying of the winner had been introduced only as a link in a well-constructed plot this made no difference to the play, and with Owen Nares, Cathleen Nesbitt, Nigel Bruce, Alfred Drayton and Gordon Harker in the cast the new Wyndham's production was an immediate success.

This success did not escape the notice of a Mr. Lewis Goldflam, a cardboard-box manufacturer who had written a racing novel called *Lucky Fool*, and who was powerfully struck by the thought that his novel and Wallace's play were based

on the same theme. His novel had been published five months before the actual production of *The Calendar;* and six months after the opening night, having presumably had ample time for reflection, he composed and sent to Edgar a remarkable letter.

"SIR,—

"After careful consideration and consultation with my lawyers I have decided to write to you. I am the author of a book, *Lucky Fool*, published in April of last year, with which you are already familiar, seeing that you have cribbed all you required from it to make up your play, *The Calendar.*

"Yes, I am accusing you of having helped yourself to the material in the first half of my book—that which deals chiefly with horse-racing. Briefly, I state that you have, in a very cunning manner, depicted, but camouflaged to a certain extent, all the principal characters, one of the chief dramatic situations, much of the dialogue, ideas, parts of the theme and scenes, and you have woven a plot of your own throughout it all, with an optimism of, perhaps owing to encouragement from your previous successes in this direction, getting away with it. But I am not going to allow you to get away with it this time, Mr. Wallace . . .

"To myself and many of my acquaintances who had read my book and witnessed your play . . . you have exposed yourself to be nothing more nor less than a mean cribber! And I intend to go to great extremes to publicly expose you for what you are and more firmly convince those of the public who already suspect you. Doubtless you are aware that I am far from being singular in my opinion about you —you mean cribber.

"I intend to forward copies of this letter to everyone of note in the theatrical and literary professions whom I think it will interest."

Mr. Goldflam (who wrote under the name of L. C. Gould-Flème) was as good as his word, and a great many people "of note in the theatrical and literary professions" received copies of this damaging accusation. Hannen Swaffer, who in his capacity of dramatic critic was one of the objects of Mr. Goldflam's attentions, characteristically replied: "You have made a great mistake in writing letters accusing Edgar Wallace. A man like Wallace never has to use other people's ideas. He is full of them, and anyway he is too vain to use other people's"; but there was no assurance that other recipients of the letter would regard it with Hannen Swaffer's common sense, and Edgar, always pursued by the rumour of "ghosts," had no choice but to bring an action for libel. He briefed Sir Patrick Hastings, K.C., who had already appeared for him in the Jockey Club case and had become a close personal friend, and the case was heard before Mr. Justice Mackinnon in the King's Bench Division.

From the very beginning things looked uncomfortable for Mr. Goldflam, against whom the acerbity of Sir Patrick Hastings, the neat humour of Wallace as a witness, and the gentle witticisms in which the judge indulged conspired to a heart-rending degree. Sir Gerald du Maurier and Mr. Nigel Bruce gave evidence that *The Calendar* had been written, read, and made ready for production by December 1928, four months before Mr. Goldflam's novel had been published. Mr. Goldflam replied that although *Lucky Fool* had not appeared until April 1929, it had been written at least a year earlier, and had been going the round of the publishers, in whose offices it had presumably been accessible to a large number of persons. "That means," said the judge, "that Mr. Wallace, with the assistance of some of the people of the underworld, whom, I believe, he knows so well, may have made clandestine visits to the offices of the publishers and read the manuscript in the night?" There was no answer to this supposition, and since

the judge held that there was no evidence that "Mr. Wallace or any of his emissaries" had burgled any publisher's premises, judgment with costs was given against the unhappy Mr. Goldflam, and £1,000 decided on as suitable damages to mark the jury's "sense of the gravity of the libel and of the fact that it was without any foundation." Mr. Goldflam expressed himself as being "at the moment" unable to pay either damages or costs, and was therefore required to give an undertaking not to repeat the libel. This action, amusing to everybody but the defendant, was important to Edgar because, in the course of the evidence, the pernicious rumour of "ghosts" had at last been brought into the open, and it was during this action that he made public his offer of £5,000 to anyone who could prove that he employed hacks to help him with his work, and even extended the offer to anyone who could prove that he accepted other people's ideas.

No accusation of plagiarism or employment of "ghosts" was levelled against him when *On the Spot* followed *The Calendar* into Wyndham's. Too many people had seen him gathering the material for even the most sanguine author of a gangster novel to think of suing for damages. In the autumn of 1929 his American publisher, George Doran, had urged him to pay a second visit to New York to renew contact with magazine editors and take advantage of the certain newspaper publicity. The American sales of his books were by this time very large, and Doran believed that it would be good policy for Edgar to show himself personally to the American public. Edgar was pleased with the idea, and since he had long promised Jim a visit to New York, decided to go immediately. This trip, however, was to have nothing in common with the solitary and business-like visit of nine years before; it was to be as much as possible like a luxurious royal progress. Jim, Pat, Michael and Penelope were to go as well, together with a friend of Pat's and Penelope's governess, and Bryan, who had recently been

summoned home from Hollywood, where he had been working in a film studio, was to return to America with them to complete the family. Edgar engaged the royal suite in the *Berengaria*, where he had the pleasure of using a writing-desk which had been brought on board for the use of a Prime Minister, and made the crossing in style.

The publicity, as his publisher had prophesied, in no way disappointed him, since about thirty reporters came on board at Quarantine, and were satisfactorily refreshed at Edgar's expense with cases of champagne and whisky. Moreover, he gave ninety-eight further interviews in his suite in the Hotel Marguery, and reckoned that he had bestowed 1,250 hand-shakes on his American admirers. The most profitable incident of the visit, however, was a flying visit which he paid alone to Chicago, a city he had long wished to see. Gangster terrorism and warfare were then at their height in the last years of prohibition, and he felt that his visit would be incomplete without some research into a criminal underworld which was so much more violent and picturesque than anything to be found in the murky London setting of his own novels.

It was arranged that he should be shown as much as possible in twenty-four hours, since that was all the time at his disposal, and Edgar, who had occupied himself on the train journey from New York with numerous books and newspaper articles about gangsters, was taken for a rapid and comprehensive tour of Chicago by an obliging lieutenant of police. He was shown Capone's headquarters, the Hotel Lexington (which possessed the features of so many of the mysterious establishments in his own thrillers, since, though a gang stronghold, it was still used as a middle-class hotel by unsuspecting provincials); the flower-shop where Dion O'Banion was "put on the spot"; restaurants where rival gangs had settled their differences with machine-guns; the garage which had been the scene of the St. Valentine's Day massacre. He was also driven round the old "red light"



A visit to the State prison in Chicago, just before *On the Spot.*

district, where every other house had been an open brothel until the police drove prostitution underground, and had new and flourishing bawdy-houses pointed out to him in the suburb of Cicero. Over this whole underworld at that time loomed the powerful and inscrutable figure of Al Capone, whom the Chicago newspapers and his own racketeering exploits had raised almost to the magnitude of a national hero, and Edgar was powerfully attracted by this sinister character. He listened eagerly to all that police officials and newspapermen could tell him, and even begged a collection of photographs of the gangster from the files of a Chicago newspaper.

Such a man came nearer his idea of the master criminal than any he had yet encountered. The magnitude of gangster activity, the wealth, the brutality and extravagance described to him during those crowded twenty-four hours in Chicago, touched the macabre and extravagant part of his own imagination, and set his mind running feverishly in new channels. Here at last was a villain who wore diamond jewellery and whom the police had failed to trap, a gangster who lived like a millionaire and was undisputed king in his own world, a man who struck terror into his enemies and loyalty into his henchmen by a sinister mixture of magnetism and brutality.

On the boat coming home Edgar was noticeably preoccupied, and spoke little. He spent the five days of the voyage in the idle abstraction which always meant that his mind was creatively employed, sorting his ideas, brooding on his characters, searching for the climax which should untie the complicated knot of his imagining. When he reached Portland Place he told his personal secretary, Jenia Reissar, that he had a new play complete in his head down to the last detail, and Curtis was told to stand by with dictaphone and typewriter.

The first day of writing *On the Spot* Edgar spent alone in his study in his usual fashion, fire blazing, windows closed, the heavy glass screen that shielded him from the least suspicion

of draught drawn closely round his desk; but after the first day the play was progressing so smoothly that he was able to continue by dictation, and for three days Miss Reissar transferred the speeches of Tony Perelli and his associates to paper while Edgar sat back in his chair in his dressing-gown, dictating almost without a pause round the stem of his long cigarette-holder. The brutal drama absorbed him as no other had done; he did not pause in his dictation even to indicate which character was speaking, but so unmistakable were the changes in his voice, so telling the gestures that he involuntarily made, that the secretary's pencil hardly faltered. At the end of four days the play was finished, and Edgar retired to bed to make up for lost sleep and to recover from his abnormal mental activity.

The question of an actor for the part of Perelli was not difficult to decide. Though he had not seen him himself he had heard enthusiastic reports of Charles Laughton, who, known as yet to only a limited public, had sent audiences away shuddering and impressed from his performance in *The Man With Red Hair*. The play was sent to Laughton, who recognised in the part of the Italian gangster a magnificent vehicle for an actor possessing his own rare gift of appearing at once loathsome and attractive, ruthless and sentimental; and before long, with Laughton as Perelli, Emlyn Williams as his laconic henchman, and Gillian Lind as the gangster's Chinese mistress, it had gone into rehearsal as the successor to *The Calendar* at Wyndham's.

Without doubt it is Wallace's best play, and perhaps even the finest melodrama of our time. It differs from all his other crime plays in its complete lack of the element of mystery, and in the economical power with which he built up his characters. The identity of the villain is not concealed from the audience, but is made abundantly clear in the first scene of the play; we are a witness to his crimes of murder and cruelty, and his extravagant pretensions, his lust, greed and ruthlessness are

displayed as openly as the malevolence of Iago. In such a character, his weaknesses and superficial attractions become almost as terrifying as his vices; Perelli seated at the organ, Perelli loading his women with jewels and the coffins of his enemies with orchids, is a conception of convincing villainy in the grand manner, and in the hands of Charles Laughton became a polished and appalling figure of criminality.

The creative frenzy which had marked the writing of the play carried Edgar through the rehearsals, which he directed himself. With an artiste of Laughton's calibre to work with, and a play which he knew in his heart to be his best, his gift for production came into brilliant and energetic flower, and he might well have sat in his box on the first night in the happy consciousness that he had produced his masterpiece. But on the first night a nervous reaction had set in, the result of the concentrated confidence and effort which he had put into the play, and despite the fact that he appeared complacently impassive, and laughed as appreciatively as ever at his own witty lines, his feeling was, as he described it, "negative." Though he heard the enthusiasm of the applause, he could not make up his mind whether he had got a success or a failure: he had heard applause before, and had been disillusioned. It was not until the small hours of the morning, when he sent anxiously down to Fleet Street for the London editions of the newspapers, that he knew that *On the Spot* had been acclaimed as he had hoped it might be, and his mind was set at rest.

It was almost inevitable that he should have been unable to follow *The Calendar* and *On the Spot* with a third success, but he was unprepared for a sequence of one indifferent play and three failures. *The Mouthpiece*, laboriously written and subjected to endless alterations, for once made him sufficiently doubtful of his own work to follow the suggestions of a dangerously large number of advisers; and his lack of conviction is everywhere apparent in the play, which is flimsily

sustained by an improbable plot—the designs of a group of crooks to marry one of their number to a girl who, unknown to herself, has become the heiress to an immense fortune. The whole play depends on the girl's ignorance of her inheritance, and the crooks diligently keep newspapers out of her way for the whole of three acts; but in a world equipped with such modern phenomena as the telephone, telegraph and sensation-hunting reporter her sustained innocence of the fact that she is a multi-millionairess is calculated to irritate even a credulous audience, and did not fail to exasperate the critics. In spite of the charms of Margaret Bannerman, who played the heroine, Edgar realised on the first night that the play was doomed, and feverishly began writing another to take its place. For the first time he had found himself facing definite hostility in the audience, for there had been some perfunctory booing, and a voice from the gallery had shouted "None of your rubbish!" when he appeared to make his speech after the final curtain—an incident which was duly recorded in the newspapers. For a few days he had struggled to save the play from ignominious collapse, calling emergency rehearsals, rewriting several scenes and introducing a new character, but the struggle was a hopeless one, and at the end of a fortnight had to be abandoned. The theatre, however, was dark for only a week, for after the first night of *The Mouthpiece* he had dashed off a breathless gangster melodrama in the hope of repeating the triumph of *On the Spot.*

During the American visit which had given him the material for his best play he had visited Sing Sing prison, had been interested and amused by the freedom and comparative luxury allowed to convicts in the newly built modern wing, and had been allowed to examine the death cell and electric chair in the forbidding "old block" of the Ossining jail. The death cell in particular had fascinated him; he had, in his early days as a reporter, been present at several hangings, but had never seen

an electrocution; and although at the last moment he refused the warden's pressing suggestion that he should allow himself to be strapped into the electric chair (preferring Bryan to perform this interesting piece of research) the thought had lingered in his mind that the "smoky cell" and the electric chair would make a startling setting for a gangster melodrama. Already, on the first night of *The Mouthpiece*, when he realised that the play was being coolly received, he had mentioned this idea to Patrick Hastings during one of the intervals, adding casually that as *The Mouthpiece* looked like being a flop he had better write this death-cell drama at once and have it ready to put on within three weeks. He was as good as his word. *Smoky Cell* was written in a few days, rushed into rehearsal, and opened exactly twenty-one days after its predecessor.

The heat of inspiration which had breathed vigorous life into his first gangster play, however, was sadly lacking from the second, which was forced into sensationalism by macabre and artificial devices. The rattle of machine-guns, scream of police sirens and firing of revolvers bruised the ears of the audience from the first act to the last, and their nerves were further shattered by a bomb with which the hero played threateningly for the best part of a scene; but these noises, though they dazed the audience, still remained only stage effects, and the touch of real genius with which Perelli had been conceived and his squalid drama constructed was noticeably absent. Edgar himself was unable to be present at the first night, being due in Berlin for the production of another of his plays, and the tension of the performance was increased by a series of accidents. The play bristled with difficult stage effects, and Jim, whose nerves always suffered severely on a first night, was left to shoulder the responsibility alone, without the comfort of Edgar's imperturbable presence. Her apprehension was entirely justified. Harold Huth, the leading man, suffered one of those agonising failures of memory which haunt the dreams

of all actors, and Bernard Nedell's revolver went off in his pocket during a speech, painfully skinning his leg and unnerving the audience. This was too much for Jim's overwrought nerves, and, unable to bear the strain a moment longer, she left the royal box and sat with clenched fists in the dark retiring room, where, in the next interval, she was found unconscious. The reports telephoned to Edgar in Berlin were not over-promising, and when the angry resentment which was his first reaction to criticism had died down he made drastic revisions in the play, introducing a heroine into what had been an all-male cast and rewriting several of the scenes.

Smoky Cell ran for four months, and was taken off to make way for a play which was to prove his greatest theatrical failure. Some weeks before, his twelve months' lease of Wyndham's Theatre (for which he was paying £408 a week) had run out, and he had had the opportunity of leasing it for a further seven years at the reduced weekly rental of £200. This opportunity had seemed too good to be missed. He saw no reason why he should not go on producing several successes a year for the next seven years, and if there were a lull in his own output he could always, at a pinch, produce the work of other dramatists. "My primary object is to make money," he said to a reporter when his taking of the seven years' lease became known; "my own plays will not be given preference if I get one I consider better." And now he had found a play which, if he did not precisely consider it better than anything of his own, at least seemed to him to contain a handsome possibility of profit, since it had already been a success in Germany.

The play had been brought to him by Ronald Squire, the actor, who had been particularly successful in several comedies adapted from the German, and who saw in this typically Teutonic piece a promising vehicle for his own talents. It is difficult to imagine anything less suited to Edgar's own gifts

than a heavily conversational play about convent life, but he was ready to believe that the venture would be successful, and himself adapted it from the literal translation. The new partnership between himself and Squire was hailed with interest by the critics, but when the play, re-titled *Charles III*, followed *Smoky Cell* into Wyndham's, the regular Wallace audience was frankly baffled. In the place of detectives and criminals they found nuns, an abbess, a novice and a cardinal occupying the stage, and instead of identifying a master crook they were asked to remain in suspense over the problem of whether or not a runaway novice had given birth to a child.

In the original German the play may have possessed some gaiety and charm, but in Edgar's adaptation it was unconvincing and bewildering, and not even Peggy Ashcroft's innocent appeal as the novice or Ronald Squire's fine double performance as the young philanderer and the cardinal could save the audience from a feeling of blank dismay. The long conversational scenes were received with polite coughs, and in spite of an apparently enthusiastic reception (as misleading as first-night receptions frequently are, and in this case, perhaps, noisy in proportion to the audience's bewilderment) the critics next morning did not hesitate to brand the play as a gloomy curiosity, and for the next six performances the theatre was almost empty. For one of those performances only £27 was taken at the box office, and the next night £23. The play was taken off at the end of a week, and the theatrical partnership between Edgar and Ronald Squire ended abruptly.

The failure of *Charles III* was the cause of a curious quarrel with Hannen Swaffer, in which Edgar behaved with unusual lack of dignity, and which itself produced a still more curious sequel. Swaffer's condemnation of the play had been particularly vitriolic, and Edgar, who by this time had undertaken the editorship of the failing *Sunday News* as a congenial side-line, launched a hostile campaign against Swaffer which looked as

though it were deliberately intended to ruin him. The two men had been casual friends for many years, ever since the time when they had been reporters on the *Daily Mail*, but each by this time found the other's egotism exasperating, and Edgar's attack was inspired with surprising venom. True to his usual practice as an editor, he was writing the theatre page, the racing page and the leader page more or less single-handed, and for several weeks the theatre section was largely devoted to harrying Swaffer, who was never referred to more respectfully than as "Old Swaff." Under a pretence of friendly criticism Edgar sneered at his pretensions, his salary, his reputation and his spiritualism. "Swaff has made enemies," he wrote, "because he hurts people. Of course he hurts people! If he didn't he wouldn't be noticed, and that would be death to him. He has no acutely aggressive qualities; in real life he is rather a timid man. What appears in him to be senseless malignity is merely part of his defence, like the stink of the polecat. He has got himself regarded as the theatrical terrorist, and he loves it. Right well the artful old devil knows that he has no other title to fame." This attack was further enlivened by an offensive cartoon which showed Swaffer surrounded by goblin-like apparitions who were pelting him with tambourines, brickbats and collar-studs, and which carried the ribald caption, "The spirits throw things at him—and they're right!"

This undignified campaign was carried on for several weeks, and no peculiarity of Swaffer's gave Edgar more congenial material for his jokes than the former's professed and highly publicised spiritualism. Edgar's attitude towards spiritualism was one of scepticism mingled with discomfort. He disliked the subject, as he hated all thought of death, and, while he was not prepared to deny the spiritualist assertion of personal survival, he was disgusted by what he considered the vulgar charlatanry of professional mediums. Less than a year before, in an article called "Why Not Leave The Dead Alone?" he had

plainly stated his views in *London Opinion*. "I do not believe that anyone," he wrote, "by falling into an epileptic fit, or a good imitation of one, secures the mysterious power of bringing themselves into touch with these personalities which have no longer habitation in the human frame . . . Why should spirits blow horns and tin trumpets, and pick up tambourines and shake them? When we depart this mortal life do the sanest of us become clowns? Why is all this dreary nonsense necessary if it is not that it is tricks which are easily performed by an unscrupulous medium? . . . As I have said before, charlatanism reigns in this peculiar sphere." His distaste for the subject was the repugnance of the ordinary man who has no convictions one way or the other on the question of life after death, but who feels that the conventional manifestations of spiritualism are the effects of deliberate trickery on human credulity. He had never examined the subject because he had never been sufficiently interested, and he discouraged others from discussing it in his presence. He refused to commit himself to absolute scepticism, but he made it quite clear that he regarded the articulate survival of individual "spirits" as a pathetically human superstition. "I believe that thought and mentality are indestructible," he had written. "I believe there exist in the ether millions and billions of ideas, great impulses, wonderful germs of genius, which attach themselves, and possibly can be shepherded into attaching themselves, to the living. But they cannot be made visible. Ideas have no shape and no articulate voice. I believe that it is possible to receive impressions from the dead, and not only an impression, but a sort of invisible and unspoken encouragement, but I will never believe that that encouragement and that communication can be made active by anybody who calls himself a medium." Some time before his death Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, anxious to find a successor to himself as leader of the spiritualist movement, had made tentative overtures to Edgar, well knowing

that a man with his popular following would have been a valuable instrument of propaganda; but Edgar had made his scepticism clear, and refused to have anything to do with a cult of which he held such deeply rooted suspicions.

His attitude to spiritualism being what it was, he regarded Swaffer's extensive dealings with mediums as a particularly good joke, and for the first few weeks of his hostile campaign in the *Sunday News* it did not occur to him that his ribald attacks on the journalist's personal beliefs were in questionable taste. After a month of Swaffer-baiting, however, he seems to have realised that he had gone too far. Several of his friends had urged him to give up this undignified persecution; a rumour had reached him that Swaffer was being advised to take action for libel, and complaining letters were being written to the *Sunday News* by spiritualist readers. His personal quarrel, he found, had got a little out of hand, and if the experience which, according to his next *Sunday News* article, was responsible for his abandoning it, were not simply his own imaginative way of making the *amende honorable*, then one has to admit that the spirit world intervened at an opportune moment.

According to the article, he was sitting in his study late at night when he was visited by a mysterious apparition. He was tired, he said, had had "a very heavy week," and, since he had recently recovered from a sharp attack of bronchitis, had "spent most of the evening swigging erratically at medicine bottles." He was idly scribbling a few paragraphs, "pulling the leg of a very well-known journalist about spiritualism," when a voice in the room said: "I think it is very silly, and you ought to be ashamed of yourselves." The effect of this phenomenon was to make him take his own temperature, but finding that the thermometer showed him to be normal, he strolled into his wife's room and chatted for a few minutes about ordinary subjects. When he came back he found that his watch and chain had been moved off the paper on which

he had been writing, and that the paper itself had been burned to a cinder in the fire. After this further manifestation he sensibly went to bed. At five o'clock the next morning his bronchial cough awoke him, and he was surprised to see a woman sitting in an arm-chair in the corner of his study. This woman, though he had never seen her before, he immediately recognised as Swaffer's dead sister-in-law. She offered him her condolences on his heavy losses at Newmarket, and immediately vanished. He was "terribly tired," he said, and after trying to "puzzle it out" went back to sleep. "It was very odd," concluded the article, "and in a sense both unromantic and undramatic, which to my mind is the most irritating feature of my experience. The brother-in-law of this woman is a friend of mine, though at the moment we are, let us say, 'estranged.' I am not asking anybody to give me their similar experiences, because spiritual experiences bore me; and any member of the Psychical Research Society who wants to examine my room will be shot at sight. But there it is, and, to use a commonplace, you can't get away from it. The only change of attitude it will make, so far as I am concerned, is that I shall no longer sneer at spirits." So great, indeed, was his boredom with "spiritual experiences" that he refused to discuss this remarkable occurrence even with his family, and exhibited a mixture of irritation and embarrassment whenever it was mentioned. But the attack on Swaffer was gracefully dropped, and the spiritualist readers of the *Sunday News* were presumably appeased. One's confidence in the genuineness of the experience is perhaps tempered by other romantic adventures of Edgar's which happened only in print.

There were other results of the failure of *Charles III*, however, which were more prosaic than this one, since the rent of Wyndham's was still £200 a week, and it became immediately necessary to produce another play. Edgar decided to fall back on his old blend of comedy and thriller. He had never forgotten

the success of his Mrs. 'Arris sketch in *The Whirligig*, and determined to repeat the experiment by hurriedly providing Maisie Gay with a full-length vehicle. *The Old Man* was thrown together during a week-end and put into rehearsal the following Tuesday. It was a hasty shaking up of ingredients which had served him well in the past—mystery, burglars, a pinch of high life and a thorough flavouring of Cockney comedy. Maisie Gay as Mrs. 'Arris, promoted from charwoman to barmaid, "in shoes that pinch"—to quote *The Times*—"in boots that permit elastic relief, in moods of sentiment and spasms of fear, in farce, in pantomime, and in her cups," gallantly worked to cover the uncertainties of the plot, but even after paying full tribute to her raffish broad comedy the critics had to admit that "*The Old Man* is not good Edgar Wallace." "The story . . . jogs along good-humouredly," said *The Times*, "and the audience received it with applause. So will loyal inhabitants of the Wallace country wave at the daily passing of the Wallace train, but our own welcoming handkerchief must remain in our pocket. There is something depressing in dramatic railway lines; they are so sadly regular." Within ten weeks Wyndham's was dark once more.

This run of failures was alarming, and although Edgar put a bold face on it and assured interviewers that he had made more money from the film and serial rights of his failures than he had lost in their actual production, he was seriously disturbed. In the course of the past five years he had, on his own reckoning, had nine successes and five failures, and it became urgently necessary to produce a really good play if the failures were not to overtake and outnumber the successes, and the public to expect nothing from him (as one critic had already suggested) than "thrills and excitement, relieved by a low order of comicality." Reviewing the position, he decided to return unconditionally to his old style of melodrama, and to abandon experiments in favour of the pure mystery thriller

which had pleased his public so well in *The Ringer*, *The Squeaker*, and *The Flying Squad*. "I am sending *The Old Man* on a short tour," he wrote in the *Sunday News*, "after which I shall produce the play with which I shall begin my new Wyndham's policy. It was to inaugurate this policy that I took a long lease of Wyndham's and had the house reseated . . . I am going back to playing unadulterated English drama on *The Ringer* lines. Every excursion I have ever made into other fields has been more or less a failure . . . Evidently we cobblers have to stick to our lasts."

His new play, *The Case of the Frightened Lady*, was written with care, and, since it was the type of play which he wrote better than anyone else, it still remains one of his most polished and successful melodramas. The murderer, true to his old tradition, is not revealed until the last scene, and then with a force of drama and suspense which is genuinely terrifying; and the comic relief is provided by a morose and self-opinionated detective sergeant—a part written specially for Gordon Harker, whose individual artistry was as perfectly adapted to the dialogue as if he had been invented by Edgar himself. With such material (and the fact that the dramatist deliberately "cheats" the audience on one or two points makes no difference to the grip of the melodrama) and with Emlyn Williams in the part of the homicidal young lord whose brain-storm murders are desperately concealed by his family, the play was certain of success, and Edgar, considering his own theatrical future and the long lease of Wyndham's, was able to breathe freely. He had not, after all, lost the golden touch on which fortune depended; he was only fifty-six years old; there were still six years of his Wyndham's lease to run, and he saw no reason why he should not write and produce a dozen more successes. He had no suspicion, then, that the play which would follow the *Frightened Lady* into Wyndham's would be his last, and that he himself had only six months to live.

In the last six years he had lived a fuller, a more phenomenally crowded and productive life than any other man of his time. His theatrical enterprises alone would have been enough to drain the energies of a normal man, but in the same short space of time which had seen the production of sixteen of his plays in London and abroad he had been working hard as chairman of a new film company, had become the editor of a Sunday newspaper, had written an almost daily racing column in the *Star* while contributing innumerable articles to other papers, had dabbled in politics, and had reached the peak of his phenomenal book production. Since 1926 Hodder and Stoughton alone had published twenty-eight new Edgar Wallace novels, and a considerable number besides had appeared under the imprint of other firms. In spite of his joking promise to Sir Ernest Hodder-Williams that if only he could get his plays to go he would "give up writing books," he had been producing them with a rapidity which made his earlier efforts seem sluggish by comparison, and the mass-production policy of his publishers had won him a public which yearly grew more avid. "I feel that my reading public is increasing," he had written to Ralph Hodder-Williams at the end of 1925, "and will increase still further in the near future . . . Scarcely a day passes that I do not learn of new Wallace fans. I am curious to know who has the best collection of my books. I believe it is either Lord St. Davids, a Smithfield butcher, or a chemist in Bath, who write at odd intervals asking if they have missed any." The following month he was writing again: "I don't know how many books I shall write this year, but I am quite sure the majority of them will be good . . . It is entirely due to you that I have discovered there is money to be made out of books. John Long" (who was publishing a number of his novels) "pleaded with me to hold up the publication of any other book I may be contemplating to give his book a chance. I have told him that you plan to publish

two *in the same week*. I have not heard from him since, so I presume that the shock has been a little more than he could endure."

In 1926 Lord Riddell, then the proprietor of the *Strand Magazine* as well as the *News of the World*, had asked him to write a short autobiography. "Originally," he wrote to his publisher, "he wanted this for the *Strand Magazine*, but when the 'life' was outlined he thought it was of such interest, particularly to the millions who are struggling along in a rut, that I had to write it in detail for the *News of the World*. He thought that a paper with nearly four million circulation and twelve million readers would be the best medium. Do you want to see this 'life' which will be ready in a few days? . . . It will be about 40,000 words in length." Sir Ernest had wished not only to see it but to publish it, and had brought it out in book form the same year under the title of *People*—a book which, in its conscious and unconscious self-revelation, is by far the best and most interesting that Edgar ever wrote, and which, in spite of its minor inaccuracies, the results of haste and carelessness, and its suppressions of fact, which were deliberate, achieved a warmth of life and reality of character which made at least one eminent critic, Mr. Edward Shanks, hail him as "a lost Dickens."

The zest of writing which gave *People* its individual and authentic flavour was not apparent in all the books produced during this period of forced activity; his serials were inspired more often by the need of money—a need which increased in proportion to his earnings—than by any urge to express a new idea; it would have been a miracle if his thriller-writing had not become by this time at least partly mechanical. His speed of writing—or, rather, of dictation—had increased through long years of practice until even his most intimate friends were baffled by it. Sir Patrick Hastings, spending a week-end at Chalklands, Edgar's country house, had seen him

dictate a full-length novel, *The Devil Man*, between Friday night and Monday morning, and had been aghast at Edgar's airy assurance that the feat was nothing extraordinary. Edgar had disappeared during dinner on the Friday night, and Jim had explained to the guests that he was worrying over the beginning of a serial. During the night Sir Patrick, who was sleeping badly, had got up and gone to Edgar's study, where he found him sitting at his desk in a dungaree suit and dressing-gown, dictaphone mouthpiece in hand, and a cup of tea at his side. He had listened to the dictation for an hour or two, and had watched Edgar drink a cup of sweet tea every half-hour, brought in by a servant who remained on duty all night for the purpose. He had then gone to bed, leaving his host still working. Edgar continued at his desk, with only a couple of hours of sleep, all that night and all the following day. He slept till noon on Sunday morning, and then worked throughout the afternoon and the whole of the night. By nine o'clock on Monday morning, pallid, unshaven, and with almost hysterical fatigue lining his face, he announced that he had finished his 80,000-word novel on the life of Charles Peace, and went to bed for two days with the satisfaction of knowing that he had earned £4,000 in serial rights in sixty hours.

This killing pace of production was, as he had protested, merely a part of his routine, and he planned his new novels six or seven at a time. "Watt has asked me whether I will contract for an additional six books," he wrote to his publisher. "I have told him to tell you 'six—sixteen—or sixty' . . . This is the up-to-date arrangement I have made for delivery of script:

In January
(1) *The Flying Squad.*
(2) A book not named.
(3) *Again the Ringer!*
(4) *Again Sanders!*



Chalklands, Bourne End: Jim, Edgar, Michael and Bryan.



At British Lion Studios: with Edna Best, Herbert Marshall, and T. Hayes Hunter during the filming of *The Calendar*.

In February (5) *The Orator.*
(6) A story not named.
In March (7) A story not named.

. . . I have two other serials to write during the first half of the year. I am leaving for Switzerland on Friday."

The visits to Switzerland were no longer holidays, for the dictaphone was always set up in his hotel sitting-room as soon as he arrived, and one or other of his secretaries was always included in the large party of family and friends which he took with him. While the others enjoyed their winter sports by day and dancing by night Edgar, a little sorry for himself and consequently difficult in temper, would work in his steam-heated room with the windows closed, frankly envious of their pleasure, but refusing to share it. The days when he had indulged in a little cautious tobogganning, and had liked to watch the bob-racing and skating, were long past, and his holidays at Caux differed not at all from his ordinary working life in London. His occasional visits to Germany, which he enjoyed, since he had become one of the best-selling authors of that country,[1] and received even greater adulation and publicity in Berlin than at home, always coincided with the German production of one of his plays in which his personal direction was needed, or, as in the case of the Düsseldorf visit in 1929, were the result of combined journalism and publicity. The visits to Berlin were anything but a rest. His books, which had been the first to put detective fiction on a respectable footing in Germany, had made him a phenomenally popular figure, and newspaper reporters, photographers, caricaturists, agents, publishers and translators passed in a continuous stream through his suite at the Adlon. "For some extraordinary reason," he wrote in a letter from Berlin in 1927, "there is a

[1] Miss Cicely Hamilton in her book *Modern Germanies* (1931) describes Edgar Wallace as the "dominant English author in Germany" and more popular than either Shaw or Galsworthy.

Wallace vogue in Germany. I don't think *The Ringer* started it. I have been sketched by the artists of half a dozen papers—and the pictures have appeared. If you saw the caricatures you would acquit me of boastfulness! But it is awfully astonishing to find oneself known in a strange land. They have always been very nice to me in Berlin, however. My little Leipzig publisher is putting out *People*, which ought to help in the way of shameless propaganda." The "shameless propaganda" was apparently not without effect, for when he revisited Germany at the end of the following year a crowd of four hundred people met him at Leipzig station, and every Berlin revue contained a reference to him.

His plays and books, however, were not allowed to occupy all his energy, for film-making, which had wakened his amateur ambitions during the war, was now one of his major interests and a fruitful source of income. In 1926 he had made overtures to several film companies in the hope of selling to one of them the exclusive film rights of all his novels, and the following year, when the new Quota Act had given birth to a mushroom growth of British film companies, he had been invited on to the board of the new British Lion Film Corporation as chairman. British Lion had been floated as a public company under the managing directorship of Mr. Samuel W. Smith, and Edgar's chairmanship was admittedly a form of popular window-dressing. Part of the contract, however, was that the company should have the exclusive film rights of everything he wrote, and in consideration he received a down payment of £10,000 in the form of shares, which he immediately sold before they had had time to appreciate. Besides this, he was to receive £1,000 for every picture made, 10 per cent of the gross receipts, and a nominal director's fee of £500 a year.

Edgar was well satisfied with this arrangement, though it cannot be said to have shown great financial foresight on his part. By disposing permanently of all his film rights at one

blow he deprived himself of many thousands of pounds, since the individual sale of his novels to competing film companies would eventually have netted him far more than the approximate £26,000 which he made out of his five years' association with British Lion. In this, however, as in so many of his short-sighted business transactions, an immediate cash payment was far dearer to Edgar's heart than a nebulous possibility of future profit, and by selling himself exclusively to British Lion he made certain of being able to direct at least a few of his own pictures.

The company moved into the ramshackle, out-of-date George Clark Studios at Beaconsfield and briskly set about reconditioning and equipping them. Edgar rented a furnished house at Bourne End, which was near at hand. In less than a year the studios were converted and ready for production, and silent films of *The Ringer*, *Chick*, *The Forger*, *Red Aces*, *The Man Who Changed His Name*, *The Clue of the New Pin*, *The Valley of Ghosts* and *The Flying Squad* were made at break-neck speed in the first eight months. Of these, Edgar directed only one, *Red Aces*, and in spite of hard work and an unusual willingness to take advice, proved himself an indifferent "silent" director. He was too thoroughly imbued with stage technique to adapt himself at short notice to the very different requirements of the silent film, and after this one experiment his silent pictures were all made by professional directors. With 1929, however, the talkies arrived, and British Lion, which had been in production for less than a year, was faced with the expensive problem of complete reconstruction, and soon after Edgar, as chairman, had to break it to the shareholders at the annual meeting that the company showed a loss on the year of £49,428. Studio reconstruction occupied the next nine months, and Edgar busied himself with buying Chalklands, a moderately large house on the hill above Bourne End, and by the addition of two wings, stables and an elaborately planned garden

turning it into an impressive one. He had fallen in love with this civilised stretch of the Thames, and Bourne End had the added advantage of being within easy reach of London and the Beaconsfield studios.

By February, 1930, the studios were ready for talking-picture production, and Edgar himself was able to direct *The Squeaker*. It was work he loved, and he quickly showed that in talking pictures at least he had the makings of a director. His stage technique was now no hindrance, for the early talkies were nothing but filmed plays, and he was able to use his theatre experience with the added pleasure of discovering the possibilities of a new medium. As a film director he took himself very seriously, and demanded, as always, the maximum of hard work from everyone concerned. He forbade smoking on any part of the premises (a rule which he himself heroically obeyed) and arrayed himself in the breeches and boots which in the early silent days had been the picturesque uniform of the old-fashioned Hollywood director. The film studio to him was an exciting extension of the theatrical world, and he responded with gusto to its technical problems and its peculiar atmosphere of nerve-strain, excitement and exasperation. Heavily seated in his canvas chair, his hat tilted back from his brow and a script in his hand, he enjoyed his new role so much that he would accept no money from the company for playing it. It was pure pleasure, and he shrewdly took advantage of the excellent publicity which it afforded; it pleased and flattered him to appear before the public in this new character. He did not direct the films which followed—*The Calendar*, *The Case of the Frightened Lady* and *Whiteface*—but he took an active part in the life of the studio, gave innumerable interviews on the future of British films, and wrote expansively about his own productions in his *Sunday News* articles.

It was early in 1931 that he had become editor of the *Sunday News*, the modern survivor of the *Lloyd's Weekly News* which

he had read in the Freemans' kitchen as a boy, and which now was having a precarious struggle for existence. His appointment was a desperate attempt to infuse new blood into a dying paper, and he had responded, as we have already seen, by writing as much of it as possible. "Nick o' Lincoln" was revived for the racing columns, and Edgar himself dictated the leaders, the principal articles and the theatrical gossip. A Sunday newspaper was an ideal platform for a man who had books, plays and films of his own to offer to the public, and he made full use of it "in the way of shameless propaganda." His own productions, the actors and actresses appearing in them, his books, his friendships, his horses and his private quarrels gave the *Sunday News* during his six months' editorship almost the flavour of a personal diary; but the paper was in its death struggles when he took it over, and in August, 1931, it breathed its last—or rather, in the polite euphemism which is conventionally used to describe the death of a newspaper, was "amalgamated" with the *Sunday Graphic*.

This editorship, however, which was not quite his last, was only a part of the immense journalistic output of his last few years. With the achievement of personal fame he had become a desirable contributor in the eyes of nearly every newspaper, and had lost none of the speed and pungency which had distinguished his earlier career as a working journalist. He was prepared to write on any and every topic dear to the hearts of editors, from capital punishment to the sins of the modern girl, and, however shallow his knowledge of any particular subject, he was always able to assume a clear and immediate attitude, and to address himself with attractive liveliness to the general reader. Editors knew him as a never-failing contributor who could be relied on to supply a popular article at a moment's notice and who would never keep them waiting, and if he commanded high prices from some of them he was equally obliging to old Fleet Street friends who had less money

to offer; for them he would willingly write a good article for five or ten guineas. The habit of overwork had, in fact, so strong a hold on him in these last years that he had almost lost the ability to say "no"; one article more or less during the day made little difference; it was merely a matter of half an hour with the dictaphone, and handing a cylinder to Curtis.

As early as 1927 he had agreed to write a continuous series of racing articles for the *Star*, and though the number of them had eventually been reduced to two a week he had kept these up, with very few interruptions, throughout the flat-racing season ever since. These articles had had an enormous following, and had made an appreciable difference to the *Star's* circulation; they had also comfortably added to his own income at the rate of £3,000 a year. As in the *Evening Times*, he brought an alert and original mind to the subject of racing, and found it easy to write entertainingly of the sport which was now his dearest, indeed his only, relaxation, and which had taken the place of regular and conventional holidays. The tips which he insisted on giving in his articles were received by editor and readers alike with indulgence; his value was as an almost inspired commentator on the whole sport of racing. By 1930 he was himself the owner of a string of twenty-one horses, which, if they differed very little in quality from the original Sanders and Bosambo, at least gave him some standing as an owner in the eyes of the public, and he could comfort himself with the reflection that the £3,000 which he earned from the *Star* went very nearly half-way towards their keep.

In the hope, perhaps, of contributing still further to their support, he also, in the spring of 1930, contracted to write a daily racing article for the *Daily Mail*, and had the satisfaction of feeling that his visits to Newmarket and every other important race-course were no longer mere pleasure excursions, but could be seriously considered as legitimate and profitable business. As a logical corollary to this proposition he tried to

obtain income-tax relief on the grounds that his ownership of race-horses was a necessary part of his work as a turf expert, and his trainers' fees among the unavoidable expenses of a racing journalist; but the Commissioners of Inland Revenue were unconvinced by his deductions, and he had to abandon the economical plan of making his racing journalism and his race-horses pay for one another.

Dramatic criticism, too, had attracted him for a time, and he offered himself to his old friend, H. A. Gwynne, now the editor of the *Morning Post*, as permanent dramatic critic. Mr. Gwynne had replied that unfortunately the *Morning Post* was able to pay its dramatic critic only ten guineas a week, but to his surprise Edgar had brushed this objection aside, and had assured him that he would be happy to do it for less. Accordingly, for a period of several months, until the work had been smothered by his own theatrical activities, he had written a weekly article on the theatre, and from time to time reviewed the principal plays. He would drive to the *Morning Post* office in his large cream-coloured Rolls, walk into the reporters' room, take off his coat, and with a cup of strong office tea at his side hammer out his copy cheek by jowl with the junior reporters. His pride in his ability as a newspaper-man made him scorn to advance his other activities as an excuse for being late or dilatory with his copy, and in the course of his articles displayed a common sense which was as sound as it was characteristic. "The first job of the stage aspirant," he wrote in one of them, when he had been receiving the usual persuasive letters from the mothers of daughters, "is to discover the difference between acting and character-acting. Unfortunately so many people who come to the stage confound one with the other. In a sense all acting is character-study, but the real art is to play convincingly the everyday characters of life, and not to represent the eccentrics whom we seldom meet more than once a year. Every piano entertainer could

imitate the late Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree, just as every present-day entertainer could imitate Harry Lauder. It is the young actor or actress who can give a passable imitation of Leslie Faber and Gladys Cooper in straight parts who will most readily find a job on the stage."

This work on the *Morning Post* had, moreover, been supported by two long series of articles to which he had given much thought, and which (the first on present-day England and the second on modern Germany) were entertaining, if not particularly instructive, because of what he himself called his "ability to sort first impressions." That phrase of his might, indeed, be taken to express the first and most essential requirement of the good journalist. Certainly it was an ability that Edgar himself possessed in the highest degree, making him eager to pursue to the end of his life the profession in which, in his astute, superficial, brilliant and entertaining way, he was incomparable.

By 1928 he was earning, from all sources, about £50,000 a year, so that he was enjoying, if not the security of a millionaire's capital, at least the lavish possibilities of a millionaire's income. The lack of capital apparently did not disturb him; he regarded his money as the direct reward of his work, and as such immediately translatable into the pleasures of living. Money saved was money not enjoyed, and what was the use of working so hard if he were forbidden to enjoy it? His idea of the enjoyment of money was, as always, recklessly extravagant, and if part of that extravagance were a large-handed generosity to others it still remained improvident and unbalanced. He relished the luxuries of life as only a man who has known poverty can relish them, and he squandered his wealth with the cheerful insouciance of the gambler. So long as he could afford it, every detail of life had to be as luxurious as possible; any economy or hint of prudence seemed to him like the actual expression of the fear that his luck might not hold for ever.

As soon as the success of *The Ringer* had made it possible, he had moved from Clarence Gate Gardens to the more befitting splendour of Portland Place, where, with two secretaries and a large staff of servants, he could work and entertain in the setting which did him justice as a successful author and dramatist, a well-known racing figure, and the lessee of Wyndham's Theatre. The little service flat in Yeoman House he still maintained, since it made a useful office and a working headquarters for his secretaries; the summers were made pleasant by rented houses on the river, at either Bourne End or Marlow. In 1929 he bought his own house, Chalklands, for £5,000, and spent a further £20,000 in furnishing and improving it. A permanent staff was installed, bringing the total number of his servants up to twenty, and their wages, including those of his secretaries, came to £100 a week. In the same year he tired suddenly of Portland Place, and pleading the strange excuse of economy, moved the entire family to a large suite in the Carlton Hotel, where they remained for six months—Portland Place in the meantime standing idle. Living at the Carlton suited Edgar's ideas of his own position better than anything else; it was his favourite hotel, and he enjoyed the mild sensation which he made when he appeared in the grill-room. Not long before he had amused Ralph Hodder-Williams by his reluctance to lunch with the publisher at his club. "Who'll see us there?" Edgar had enquired plaintively. "They stand on their chairs to see me at the Carlton." Now, established in this most expensive of London hotels, he had a private telephone run from his study to Yeoman House so that Curtis or Miss Reissar could be summoned at any hour of the day. His flamboyant Rolls was kept almost permanently waiting at the door, in case he should suddenly decide to go racing, or drive down to Chalklands.

In the matter of cars his taste was no less expensive and pretentious. Anything less than the best was a tacit confession

of defeat, or at least of uncertainty, and the fear of a possible falling-off in fortune was one which must never be admitted. The first night of *The Squeaker* was celebrated by the purchase of a second Rolls-Royce for Jim's personal use, and Bryan and Pat were each given cars of their own. He was almost morbidly sensitive to material appearances, and on one occasion insisted on buying an unnecessary new car for Bryan because he disliked seeing his ramshackle racing-machine nosing the radiator of the Rolls in Portland Place. For Curtis, too, he bought a new car, and for the same reason; shabby second-hand models standing at the kerb spoiled the luxurious fringes of his own environment.

The holidays at Caux, which had never been economically planned, had with the years assumed almost a fantastic magnitude; not only the family, complete with secretaries and governess, but a party of friends was always magnanimously included, and it fretted him if they did not give every expensive evidence of enjoyment. In the same way, the family visit to America had been conducted on millionaire's lines; nothing but the "imperial suite" in the *Berengaria* was considered adequate to the occasion, and a similar standard of luxury was maintained on his visits to Germany. His delight in giving pleasure to others had always a dramatic quality; his own pleasure would have been diminished if the recipient of his kindness had genuinely wished for something modest. A party, in his view, was not worth giving unless it were splendid enough to be spectacular, and his favourite celebration was a supper party to two hundred guests, for which he would take over the whole restaurant of the Carlton. These supper parties became famous, as he intended, and he used his own power in the theatre to make them brilliant. A first night, a last night, the occasion of two consecutive first nights or three simultaneous productions, were all wonderful excuses for entertaining the entire casts of his plays in the grand manner, and enriching the

glamour of the entertainment with all the greatest available names in the theatre. For Pat's twenty-first birthday another enormous party was arranged at the Carlton, and he scorned to give any instructions to the management less sweeping than "I expect you to do the very best you can." With the recollection of his own beginnings always half-incredulously at the back of his mind, it gave him an amazed pleasure to see the great figures of the racing and theatrical worlds dancing for his daughter's birthday, to hear Gerald du Maurier proposing her health, and see Marie Tempest leading the party in to supper.

His racing was, without doubt, his greatest personal extravagance, for, apart from the expenses of his string of race-horses (which were about as great as if he had been permanently supporting twenty-one people in a fairly good hotel), the money that he poured into the laps of the bookmakers would have kept another man in comparative affluence. A day rarely passed but his routine telephone bets amounted to £100, and only a percentage of that money ever returned. His winnings were just sufficient to keep confidence alive, and Edgar's optimism survived on meagre nourishment. He was convinced of the power of his own luck—a conviction which led him to throw away thousands on impossible "accumulators"—and in spite of all evidence to the contrary was certain that one day the tables would be turned, and the bookmakers render homage to his judgment to the tune of a million. A good win was always the sign that his luck had changed, that it was safe to bet wildly and heavily; after his own horse, King Baldwin, had by some amazing coincidence won him £5,000 at Lincoln he cheerfully lost £20,000 in three days at Ascot.

His losses in the theatre are difficult to assess. His greatest imprudence lay in backing his own plays and keeping them running for several months after they had ceased to show a profit. His reason for so doing was a mixed one. He hated to admit failure, and hung on in the belief that the play would

pick up after August, or after the King's illness, or the hot weather. Then, too, he counted on making money out of his plays by other means than from the London productions; provincial tours, film and serial rights had all to be considered, and he always hoped to force up the prices of these secondary rights by claiming for the play in question a six months' London run. He would always begin a production on fairly economical lines, listening to Jim's prudent suggestions with approval, and blandly agreeing that the most important aspect of the play was its success as a money-maker; but at the first-night party at the Carlton he would become magnificently expansive and double the salaries of half the cast, and to any criticism from his managers would crushingly reply that he was not running a cheap provincial production. His curious habit of doubling salaries on impulse was a part of the dramatic instinct which inspired all his generosities; he was exasperated by a modest request for a rise in salary and generally refused it, or at least bore an illogical grudge against the actor; but to double a man's salary without warning, to give him a friendly pat on the back and send him out of the theatre incredulously blessing his luck, gave him the deepest kind of satisfaction and pleasure, since it allowed him the *deus ex machina* role in a genuine drama.

Mr. S. E. Linnit, his Wyndham's manager, who was intimately associated with him in all his theatrical enterprises following *The Ringer*, estimates that Edgar cannot have made less than £100,000 from all the rights and profits of his plays between 1926 and 1932, but even he is unable to guess at the losses; his five theatrical failures during that period, and the ill-advised and unsuccessful revivals of *The Calendar* and *The Squeaker*, must certainly have taken their toll in tens of thousands. Edgar was not only the dramatist, with merely royalties to lose, but generally backer[1] and producer as well, for, although Jim

[1] The fact that Frank Curzon, who financed *The Ringer*, had made £30,000 out of the production while he himself had made only £7,000 in royalties, had had a profound effect on Edgar's theatrical policy.

was nominally producer at Wyndham's, and worked hard and competently at her job, the money on which productions were built and Wyndham's leased was not hers but Edgar's. His theatrical responsibilities were so complicated that in 1928 he had made an attempt to bring them together into one organisation, and for that purpose had launched his own firm of Dramisto Ltd. as a registered company. The only practical effect of the company seems to have been a certain saving in taxes, for Edgar's theatrical affairs continued in a state of extravagant and optimistic confusion. This confusion was in no way simplified by his peculiar method of drawing his personal profits; he never dreamed of waiting for the end of a run, or consulting an accountant; his invariable method was to ring up the theatre, briskly enquire how much was in the till, and, if it were enough for his immediate purposes, to send his chauffeur down for it. It was a commonplace for him to telephone Wyndham's before a race meeting and insist that he had got to have a couple of thousand pounds by the following morning; undoubtedly Edgar regarded this as the most logical and satisfying way of drawing the money due to him as a playwright, but this habit of "milking" a production from the very beginning of its run made their task neither pleasanter nor easier for accountants and managers.

As he took carelessly with one hand, so he gave away with the other, for one of the greatest pleasures of being rich was that by writing a cheque one could perform a species of dramatic magic on the fortune of others. He never boasted of his many generosities, and some of them remained a secret between himself and the recipient, but all of them possessed the pleasurable element of drama. There were so many unhappinesses in life which could be eased by a little money, and he loved to play the part of the fairy godfather, who by his unexpected gift makes all things possible. For years he had sent cheques for £50 or so to needy friends at Christmas, only stipulating that

they should spend the money on themselves, and it was not only his friends who benefited by his impulse to kindness. One night—and this was many years before he became really rich—he noticed that a girl in the box-office of a theatre was silently crying. He stopped to ask her what was the matter, and, since she seemed incapable of telling him, gave her his address and told her to come to his flat the following morning. She came, and told him that her young child was ailing, and that the doctor had diagnosed tuberculosis. She had no money to pay for a cure, and had only her job at the theatre to support her. Edgar's response to her story was to wave the magic wand of immediate generosity, and with far more thoughtfulness and delicacy than would have been implied by the mere reaching for his cheque-book. The girl was offered a nominal job as his secretary, so that she could leave the theatre, the boy was sent immediately to a sanatorium, and when the time came for the annual visit to Caux both he and his mother were taken for a holiday in Switzerland.

After Ivy's death he had invited two of her sisters, with their husbands and families, to come to England from South Africa; had paid all their expenses, taken a flat for them in London, and had extended the invitation to include a winter sports holiday. With Clara Freeman (now Mrs. Robinson, and a widow once more) he had never lost touch, and had long supported her on a generous if erratic pension. He loved to send the car to fetch her to Bourne End, so that they could spend the afternoon in reminiscences of Norway Court, George Freeman and Billingsgate Market. His own children were given enviable allowances, and Pat was encouraged in a weakness for elegant extravagance. Illogically, a request for a few pounds to settle a small debt or a laundry bill produced severe comments on the wasteful habits of his children, but he was childishly charmed to be coaxed out of £20 for a new dress, or to enable Bryan to provide a worthy supper for an actress.

Organised charity left him cold, since it lacked the warm and flattering human element that he loved; it illustrates both his weakness and his strength that the only organised fund to which he is known to have subscribed was one founded in the Press Club by himself. The Press Club Fund, founded by Edgar in 1928 with a first gift of £500, was announced by him at a club luncheon given in his honour, its object being the formation of a capital from which loans could be made, free of interest, to needy journalists. The spirit in which the fund was conceived was both practical and sympathetic; the names of its beneficiaries were kept secret, and the beneficiaries themselves limited to journalists who were both members of the Press Club and subscribers to the fund. In a sense the foundation of the Press Club Fund was Edgar's sincerest tribute to the Fleet Street he had loved and left behind. He had no fears for his own future, but he had not forgotten the two desperate years after Northcliffe had dismissed him from the *Daily Mail*, when even the few pence needed for his fare to Fleet Street had had to be scraped together, when tradesmen's bills had gone unpaid and he and Ivy had lived through a nightmare of tears and summonses. What a boon to him, in those days, such a fund would have been!—except, of course, that he would have been certain to take his loan money to the race-course, and might not even have been qualified to benefit, since one of the first rules which Edgar himself laid down was that "no member shall be entitled to a benefit unless he is in good standing, that is to say, that his subscriptions to the Club and the Fund are paid up . . ." Improvidence had always been his weakness, but he expiated at least a little of his carelessness in this thoughtful provision for his fellow-members of a precarious and improvident profession.

With so many irons in the fire, with so many achievements and experiments behind him, one might have thought that Edgar, as he approached the age of sixty, would have been

content to rest on his laurels, or at least to protect himself against the possibility of future failure; but by this time the inability to say "no" applied to more matters than the mere writing of newspaper articles; one might almost say that in one respect he had become unbalanced, since in spite of the evidence of costly failures he cherished a personal illusion of infallibility. His self-complacency was so well fed by the circumstances of his own success—wealth, publicity, influential friends and popular acclaim—that few things remained untried which could tempt his vanity. One of the few, however, was a political career, and early in 1930 the temptation came.

It is probable that if he had been left to himself he would never have raised a finger in the direction of politics, but when he was approached by the Liberal agent for the Aylesbury division of Buckinghamshire, and persuasively asked, as a distinguished resident in that area, to consider becoming the prospective Liberal candidate, he yielded at once to this new and intoxicating flattery. Instantly visions of himself as a Member of Parliament swam before his eyes, and he was enchanted with the impressive figure of his imagination. Was he not, after all, an excellent speaker? Was he not possessed of a good presence, an imperturbable calm, and a vast popular following? There was nothing, really, to stop him from joining the Cabinet. All things considered, he was surprised that he had never aimed at the House of Commons before: for, of course, he would get there easily—it was child's play compared with running a newspaper, producing a play, or picking a winner. He accepted the invitation of the Liberal Party with alacrity, stimulated by the happy prophetic vision of Edgar Wallace, M.P.

It must be admitted that his political convictions from the beginning were open to suspicion. Fifteen months before, when a rumour had reached Fleet Street that he had been asked to

stand as a Liberal candidate in the coming General Election, he had briskly cabled from Berlin to the *Daily News*—"REGARDING STATEMENT IN 'DAILY NEWS' THAT I AM AN ENTHUSIASTIC LIBERAL YOU ARE MISINFORMED. I HAVE YET TO GENERATE ANY WILD ENTHUSIASM FOR ANY PARTY." Now, however, when the flattering invitation had actually been extended, the necessary enthusiasm was magically engendered. His political knowledge was of the simple and sketchy variety usually attributed to that nebulous figure, the man in the street, and his sudden political ambitions were both opportunist and frivolous. How much of his time he proposed to devote to the House in the event of his election is difficult to judge: he would probably have regarded it chiefly as a glamorous background, in the same prestigious category as the Carlton.

In April, 1930, Lady Samuel opened a village bazaar in Aylesbury to mark the opening of Edgar's political campaign, and within a few months he himself was opening Liberal bazaars as far afield as Bournemouth, and with dangerous candour was giving his facetious reasons for standing for Parliament. "I am in politics," he told the public at one such meeting, "because I think this is the moment when any man who has any leisure—and everyone knows that I have nothing to do for at least one hour a day—should give himself and whatever talents or ability he has to the service of the country." He also told a startled audience that one of his reasons for wanting to go into the House of Commons was that "a writer of crook stories ought never to stop seeking new material."

Another of the charms of being a Parliamentary candidate was that it gave him an excellent excuse for starting a newspaper, and he immediately founded a weekly journal, the *Bucks Mail*, to serve as his medium of personal propaganda. The *Bucks Mail* Limited was registered as a company with offices in the Yeoman House flat; it was written, needless to say, principally by himself, with the assistance of a little scratch labour which

could be brought into the *Sunday News* office once a week, and Jim and Pat were appointed as permanent directors. Even the British Lion studios were pressed into the publicity campaign, and competitive tests to discover a new British film star were held with a cheerful disregard for the feelings of the several hundred bedraggled young women who travelled down from London through pouring rain, in the fond hope of reaching Hollywood by way of Beaconsfield. This search for the perfect British star was reported, as Edgar had intended, in most of the newspapers, with flattering references to his prospective candidacy, and the fact that she was never found seemed to discourage nobody.

These tactics, however, made a less favourable impression on the somewhat conservative constituency of Mid-Bucks, and Edgar became vaguely discouraged. There was no sense in putting all this energy into a campaign which might conceivably end in failure, and the sinister rumour that he would find himself contesting a safe Conservative seat appears to have disconcerted him. At all events, he suddenly decided in the following April—exactly a year after his Liberal adoption—that he was too busy at present to bother any further with politics, and with expressions of regret, and assurances that he felt himself to be "of more value in Fleet Street than as candidate at Aylesbury," resigned from the prospective candidacy. The *Bucks Mail* was allowed to dwindle discreetly for another seven months, and then was permitted the mercy of euthanasia.

Edgar shed no tears over its death, for in the preceding month he had met Mr. Lloyd George, and declaring himself, under the spell of that electrical personality, to be a "full-blooded, free-trade, Lloyd George Liberal," had been adopted as prospective Liberal candidate for Blackpool.

This was much more to his taste than Aylesbury had been, and the new slogan: "A showman for a showman's town!"

appealed to his sense of the dramatic. Blackpool, city of simple and glittering entertainment, where his novels crowded the bookstalls and his films packed the cinemas, had surely been specially designed for him as a constituency. Noisy, cheerful, raffish and exuberant, it was the perfect setting for that triumphal progress through the streets in an open car which would follow the happy results of the General Election.

CHAPTER II

The Machine Breaks Down

BEFORE he left for Blackpool in October to take part in the fortnight's campaign which should return him to Westminster, Edgar had received a tempting offer from Hollywood. The Radio-Keith-Orpheum Studios had suggested a two months' contract at £600 a week, with an option on a further two months at a higher salary. The money was attractive, and he had often expressed a fancy to go to Hollywood, which seemed a fitting setting for the most prosperous period of his bizarre career; but he was tired and restless, and had private reasons for not wishing to leave England; and in spite of the fact that he was secretly uneasy about his financial position he delayed his decision until after the General Election. One of the charms, indeed, of being a Member of Parliament was that election would give him a legitimate excuse to indulge his reluctance to accept the Hollywood offer—a reluctance which puzzled everyone who did not suspect his secret emotional conflict.

He went to Blackpool confident of success. The fact that he was completely unfamiliar with the machinery of politics, and almost as ignorant of the Liberal creed which he was preparing to demonstrate in that stronghold of Conservatism, did not discourage him; he felt that the affinity between himself and the city of entertainment was more than strong enough to outweigh any political inexperience. To be a Member of Parliament would be excellent publicity and a fine personal feather in his cap. It was simply one more thing to be undertaken and achieved, one which would set a seal on his already overwhelming popularity.

Jim, he found, was out of sympathy with these political ambitions. She, better than anyone, recognised in him the signs of nervous strain and mental fatigue, and for some time had believed that his health was not all that she could wish it. She had begged him to see a doctor, but Edgar, who ever since his army days had pinned his faith to his own self-doctoring and to patent medicines, had refused, brusquely insisting that there was nothing the matter with him. She would have been glad to see him take a prolonged rest, or at least to curb his restlessness and activity, and she heard his decision to fight the election at Blackpool with a sinking heart. A political campaign was the one thing in which she was physically incapable of helping him. She had none of the qualities considered necessary in an M.P.'s wife; she had a fundamental dislike of politics, and quailed in terror at the mere thought of public speaking. On one occasion, during his Aylesbury campaign, she had nerved herself to address a women's meeting, but the experience had been such a horror to her that she had vowed never to repeat it, and had wept hysterically in the car on the way back to town. Now, when the time came for him to go to Blackpool, she was thankful of the excuse that she could not leave Penelope; the child had recently been operated on for appendicitis, and was causing some anxiety, since the operation had revealed a tendency to tuberculosis. Edgar, consoled by Pat's ready promise to support him during the campaign, went north alone.

An encouraging flicker of publicity followed him on the journey. He was photographed at Euston, buying one of his own novels from a bookstall, and again in the Pullman, poising his pen above a sheet of paper as if immediately preparing to write another. He was met at Blackpool by the local Liberal Association, and conveyed to the Metropole Hotel and the eager arms of newspaper reporters. His own ideas of suitable publicity were characteristic and original.

Before many days had passed kiosks were established on the Blackpool front selling nothing but Edgar Wallace, and a bi-weekly paper (the organisation of which was largely left to Curtis) was launched under the candid title of *Wallace's Blackpool Banner*.

He began the campaign in good spirits, enjoying the limelight and responding alertly, as he always did, to the stimulus of an audience. Mr. Harry Boydell, the Liberal agent, took him under his wing, and in the brief time at his disposal did his best to coach him in the beliefs and behaviour of the ideal Liberal candidate. It was obviously impossible, at such short notice, to give him any real grounding of political knowledge; his conception of the Liberal policy was a broad one (hardly more sophisticated than it had been in his boyhood, when he had broken up Conservative meetings for a shilling a night for the Rotherhithe Liberal and Radical Association) and was based roughly on the idea that it was more congenial to the typical British character than any other. He had grasped readily at the idea of Free Trade, and opposition to any form of food taxes, and felt that, supported by intelligence and confidence, this single political idea would be sufficient. In his admiration for Lloyd George he had rejected the possibility of standing as a National Liberal (the proposed National Government being, to his way of thinking, a ruse to secure a solid Tory vote) and confidently declared himself a staunch member of the most unpopular section of an already diminished party.

His approach to electioneering was surprisingly naïve. As he himself said to his National Conservative opponent, Captain C. C. Erskine-Bolst, on the occasion of their first meeting, he looked forward to the contest as a "clean and fair fight." He was unprepared for heckling, for hostility, and for the offensively personal note of opposition propaganda. When he encountered these things he did his best to defend himself, but he was ill-equipped, and the attacks first wounded and bewildered,

and then angered him. He was particularly vulnerable to this species of personal broadside. His political ignorance, his confidence, his Rolls-Royce and his frank showmanship were easy targets for the jeers of the opposition, who were quick to spread stories and invent catch-phrases, and to refer to him contemptuously in public as "Mr. Wrecker Wallace," or "the red herring in the yellow Rolls." Their aim was, in Edgar's own words, to make him "look ridiculous—a circus clown giving a fortnight's turn," and as soon as he realised that the campaign was to be fought with "a greater wealth of mendacity than any I have ever witnessed," he hit back fiercely with equally unscrupulous weapons. The only detail of Captain Erskine-Bolst's private life which could be used to influence the constituency unfavourably was the fact that he owned a villa at Eze-sur-Mer in the South of France, and this harmless possession was represented as certain proof that the Tory candidate, if elected, meant to spend the rest of his life evading income tax on the Riviera. The *Blackpool Banner* broke into exuberant and atrocious verse:

"This is Eze, so sing and smile,
Where's Erskine-Bolst's domicile.
The tax inspectors have no chance
With the lads who live in the South of France."

The Conservatives replied with an even more damaging rumour that the Liberal candidate, if returned, meant to decamp immediately to Hollywood.

The fortnight's campaign was crowded and exhausting. Edgar addressed as many as five meetings a day, and in the intervals received and attempted to answer the questions of innumerable deputations. The political meetings at first were both friendly and successful. What Robert Loraine had called the "temporary glamour" of his name drew phenomenal

crowds to the halls where he was speaking, and hundreds were deflected to overflow meetings or turned away from the doors; so that Edgar, deceived by the cheerful curiosity of his audience, was able to write confidently in the *News Chronicle* that "the enthusiasm in this borough for Liberalism is an inspiration." "I am going to fight Blackpool as a plain Lloyd George Liberal," he telegraphed to Mr. Lloyd George in Caernarvon, "and I am going to win Blackpool from the food taxers. I feel that nobody is better competent to expose this national confidence trick which is gulling the public than one who has made a study of this form of crime. Good luck to you, and if you want me to go down to Caernarvon Boroughs one night and flourish a flag for you my address from Tuesday will be: Metropole Hotel, Blackpool, and from Wednesday fortnight, House of Commons, S.W.1." Mr. Lloyd George accepted his offer with alacrity, and Edgar, against all advice, gave his opponents further grounds for ridicule by going down to Caernarvon and publicly identifying himself with the unpopular and dangerously small Lloyd George section.

By the end of the first week the professional hecklers, travelling from meeting to meeting, had done their damaging work, and Blackpool audiences began to realise that Edgar's only defences against hostile political questioning were his self-possession and a telling quickness of humour. If the heckling could be answered by a spontaneous retort which turned the incident into a joke against the questioner he could hold the sympathy of his audience by raising a laugh, but if no ready witticism came to mind he was put to the shift of asking for the question to be sent in writing to his hotel—a suggestion which the audience, scenting uncertainty, received with derision. A definite hostility began to show itself at the later meetings, and Edgar, bewildered and alarmed by this unexpected development, sent for a race-course farrier of his acquaintance to act as bodyguard. He became curiously nervous and apprehensive,



In the Pullman, on his way to Blackpool.



Electioneering for Mr. Lloyd George: the Rev. Rees Griffiths, Dame Margaret Lloyd George, Edgar Wallace and Lady Carey Evans at Llandudno.

and his speeches, which from the beginning had been short, expertly delivered and politically vague, lost something of their first impressive confidence. His digestion, rebelling against the daily high-tea of fried eggs and bacon hurriedly consumed before the evening meeting, began to suffer, and he fortified his nerves and stomach with unaccustomed champagne.

He was disconcerted to discover that there were elements in the Blackpool constituency which had nothing in common with the boisterous fair-ground city that he knew, and this discovery was not made until he had mortally offended the widespread and very powerful Nonconformist element. "I am a sinner," he confided to the members of Fleetwood Congregational Church, whom he had been invited to address from the pulpit. "I go to race-courses and mix with coarse men who use coarse language. I make money out of the theatre and lose money in it." To the Congregational Church at South Shore he rashly confessed that he led "a worldly life, the life of a racing man and a man about town," and reduced the harassed Liberal agent to despair by announcing that he "was not a church member," and had "never given a bob to a church in my life." Not content with these ill-advised revelations, and so hypnotised by the pleasure city of Blackpool as to forget how small a part of the constituency it represented, he trustfully laid his plans for a brighter England before an unsmiling Lancashire audience, and told them how he hoped to see gambling casinos established in every popular resort along the coast.

Polling night came at last, and Edgar, nervously exhausted, spent the evening in the bare hall where the voting papers were being counted. Jim had come up to Blackpool for the last few days, and she and Pat gave him what encouragement they could during the anxious hours of that apparently interminable evening. They knew that his light-hearted ambition to go into Parliament had undergone a serious change during the campaign; opposition had aroused a fighting obstinacy, and the

fear that he might be defeated by a man who could boast neither fame nor spectacular achievements had concentrated all his vanity and optimism on being elected. The Labour candidate who had appeared at the beginning of the fight had been manœuvred off the stage so that Edgar might have a chance of polling the Labour vote and winning a smashing victory over his Conservative opponent, but now, as the pile of Tory votes mounted higher and higher on the counting table while his own by comparison seemed miserably to dwindle, it became apparent that he was facing humiliating failure. The counting continued until after midnight, and at one o'clock the results were in his hands. Captain Erskine-Bolst had beaten him by 33,486 votes.

A vast crowd was waiting outside the hall to hear the news, and as soon as the cheering had died down Captain Erskine-Bolst, now the new member for Blackpool, made a short speech from a first-floor window, while Edgar hovered miserably in the background. He brightened a little when the crowd began to shout for "Good old Edgar!" and spoke a few words of conventional regret, saying the polite things of his triumphant opponent which the occasion demanded. From there he drove to the Liberal headquarters, touched to find that the crowds in the streets were still friendly and cheered his car, and made another speech; but he was suffering too painfully from the shock of failure to do more than say he was sorry, and murmur the usual platitudes. He sat until the small hours of the morning in his hotel sitting-room, mournfully drinking champagne and listening to the broadcast of the General Election results, trying in vain to comfort himself by repeating at intervals that the country had gone "stark mad over this idea of a National Government."

The immediate effect of his defeat was to make him eager to leave the scene of it as quickly as possible. If there had been a train in the middle of the night he would have taken it, but he

was compelled to wait until the following morning: he was ready to leave at nine o'clock, and sent Curtis to the Liberal agent to recover his deposit. He was trembling with miserable anxiety to be gone, and when, during the drive to the station, Blackpool dealt a last wounding blow to his self-esteem, he retaliated with strange and almost hysterical anger. Some wit had added to the shouts of "Good-bye!" a cry of "—and good riddance!"—and Edgar, to Curtis's alarm, had ordered the chauffeur to stop the car and had got out, deathly pale, to punish the insult. But, not surprisingly, no one in the crowd had owned up, and there had been nothing for it but to get in again, and go on to the station smarting under this last ignominy.

The Blackpool election had taken its toll of nerves and strength, and had been a severe blow to his pride, and there was nothing now but to try and rehabilitate himself by going to Hollywood. Before doing this, however, he allowed himself to be persuaded to go to Rome with Bill Linnit for a short holiday. "I am going to Rome on Thursday," he told an *Evening News* reporter, "to have a complete rest. I shall also visit Naples—just in case. Last week I had a touch of bronchitis, and I said to myself, 'I must see Naples before I die' "—a strangely prophetic jest on the lips of a man who had only four months to live. His "complete rest," nevertheless, was a feverish round of sight-seeing, Baedeker in hand, and when the hotels, suspicious of England's recent fall from the gold standard, showed a disconcerting reluctance to cash his cheques, he became disgusted, and within ten days, and without having seen Naples, was back in London.

By this time he had become definitely uneasy about his financial position, and although a mixture of cowardice and optimism prevented him from making any real investigation into his affairs, he decided that it would be wise to take advantage of the Hollywood offer, and explore this new and

presumably rich field of future income. His exclusive contract with British Lion had, of course, guaranteed the film rights of all his writings to that company, and it was necessary to have the permission of S. W. Smith, the managing director, before signing any agreement with R.K.O.C. Mr. Smith, however, had the foresight to realise that a chairman who had had a big success in Hollywood would be an even greater asset to British Lion, and made no difficulty. Edgar was free to cable his acceptance, and immediately did so.

Within a week Mr. Smith was surprised to see him again, looking worried and uncertain. "Look here, Sam," he said, "you've got to get me out of this. I don't want to go;" and Mr. Smith, puzzled but obliging, cabled to Hollywood that Mr. Wallace was under exclusive contract to British Lion, and that he could not see his way at the moment to releasing him. Edgar left his office with assurances of gratitude and relief. A few days later, frankly dispirited, he returned once more. "It's no use," he said, "I'm broke, and I shall have to go. Can you fix it for me?" And once again the managing director of British Lion had cabled to Hollywood, expressing second thoughts on the matter and withdrawing his objections. He prudently, however, took out a £10,000 insurance policy on Edgar's life, covering the three months that he would be away, and Edgar, jokingly agreeing that it would be "a good bet," promised to do the same; but the papers of his personal policy were never signed, being thrust away and forgotten in a drawer of his desk.

Edgar's reluctance to go to Hollywood puzzled his friends, many of whom afterwards wondered whether he had been touched by any presentiment of death; but in reality his unwillingness was due to an almost morbid fear of leaving home. In the past two years he had changed considerably; overwork and unsuspected ill-health had made him irritable and restless, and his possessive temperament, inflamed by

fatigue and a worrying diminution in physical vigour, had produced in him an ungovernable jealousy of Jim. The marriage which for so long had absorbed and satisfied his emotional nature had in the last two years been insidiously undermined by this obsession, and his behaviour had become nervous, irascible, and difficult to predict. Jim was twenty-three years his junior, and an attractive, self-possessed woman with many friends; and as he advanced in middle age he was tortured by the suspicion that he was losing his hold on her. The jealousy which had temporarily unbalanced him twenty-five years before, when Ivy had naïvely confessed to a ship-board friendship, now revealed itself in a still more sinister form, and played havoc with the nerves and happiness of his whole family. His powerful and egoistical temperament demanded that he should be surrounded by interest and affection directed at him alone, and he resented independence of thought or action in either wife or children. Like most men who have any claim to greatness, he had become the autocratic centre of his private world, and his demands on his family were no less tyrannical for being deeply emotional and affectionate. He longed almost pathetically for a satisfying domestic life, from which the rest of the world could be jealously excluded; but his own temperament, possessive, self-centred, frequently unreasonable, made real domestic happiness impossible. Scenes, arguments and suspicions made his wife nervous and the children wary; the atmosphere of the house was conditioned by violent moods emanating from Edgar's study. Success had done nothing to spoil the public man, but it had eaten corrosively into his private character. Affection had become possessiveness, diffidence suspicion, and self-confidence had been warped into a more than half-illusion of infallibility.

He saw himself now, in moments of depression, as a man caught in the trap of his own success. Friends could no longer

be accepted simply as friends, but must always be under the deadly suspicion of sycophancy. In moods of self-pity he sometimes spoke of himself as a money-making machine, and said bitterly that so long as the machine worked he would never want for friends. The discovery that money could buy service, flattery, and even a species of friendship had made him abnormally sensitive to disinterested kindness. The smallest service done, as he believed, without thought of personal advantage, earned an emotional gratitude out of all proportion, and, conversely, he was hurt almost to tears by real or fancied slights. His children, with the brash tactlessness of youth, often antagonised him by small acts of thoughtlessness which another man would have scolded or ignored; Edgar's retaliation was to create an atmosphere of disgrace and disapproval in which the whole household wilted. There was an occasion when one of the younger children offended him deeply in Berlin; Edgar, who disliked stooping, had asked the child to unlace his shoes, and on being told laconically to ring for the valet, fell into a mood of reproach and agonised self-pity such as no childish laziness should have warranted. It was a small incident, but he brooded over it for days, dramatising himself into the figure of the tragic rich man who is expected to pay for every trifling and personal service. A more self-critical man might have realised that his occasional disappointment in his children was the result of their upbringing, for which he chiefly was responsible. They had been brought up extravagantly, encouraged to regard him as an inexhaustible provider who liked to see money spectacularly spent, and the fact that they lived the life to which they were accustomed, and found it difficult to establish themselves outside his powerful aura, was a direct result of his strong, though perhaps unconscious, domination. He was an indulgent father, affectionate, erratic and demanding, and it angered him to find that his own handiwork occasionally bewildered him.

On Penny, his youngest child, he lavished a doting indulgence seeing in her positive, rather arrogant personality a reflection of his own, and clinging to her youth as to a promise which could never disappoint him, and which would comfort him for the suspicion that his elder children were developing lives and interests independently. With Bryan, submerged as he was by his father's powerful personality, the strain of alternate indulgence and jealous disapproval had dangerously increased since he had committed the unforgivable indiscretion of turning from a boy into a man, and in 1928, when his son was in his twenty-fifth year, Edgar had conducted a fantastic quarrel with him which had driven him irrevocably from the house. Bryan at that time was working as a cutter in the British Lion studios, and had been invited to drive the British bob-sleigh in the world's championship which was to be run at Caux that winter, and had decided to spend his annual fortnight's holiday in practising for and competing in the event. He had asked his father's permission, which had been somewhat laconically given, and had gone cheerfully out to Switzerland to practise for the race. Three days before the championship, however, Edgar, who seems to have become justifiably nervous over the dangers of the contest, though unwilling to admit this, sent a peremptory telegram to his son to return, ending the message with the threat: "If you are not back in the studio by Tuesday, I have no further use for you." Bryan, surprised by this sudden *volte-face*, but not altogether unfamiliar with his father's unpredictable decisions, replied with a letter which pointed out that he was already entered as driver of the British team, that the race was in three days' time, that he still had a week of his holiday in hand, that his father had already given his permission, and that he now felt old enough to manage his own affairs. It was not a tactful letter, which was a pity, since it was always advisable to sacrifice plain speaking for expediency with Edgar as a father, but Bryan was unprepared

for the melodramatic developments which followed. On the day of the race he received a lengthy and astonishing telegram.

"EXTREMELY HURT BY YOUR SENSELESS AND CALLOUS LETTER I WISH TO HAVE NOTHING FURTHER TO DO WITH YOU STOP AM CONTINUING YOUR ALLOWANCE FOR ONE YEAR AFTER WHICH YOU MUST SHIFT FOR YOURSELF STOP AM HAVING ALL YOUR THINGS MOVED TO PARK LANE HOTEL I DO NOT WANT YOU TO COME TO THE HOUSE AGAIN YOU ARE BARRED FROM THE STUDIO AND ALL THEATRES UNDER MY CONTROL STOP PLEASE DO NOT WRITE I WILL NOT READ YOUR LETTERS STOP IF YOU HAVE ANY FURTHER COMMUNICATION TO MAKE THE NAME OF MY SOLICITORS IS ANDREW WOOD PURVES AND SUTTON. WALLACE."

Faced with the prospect of being disinherited as thoroughly and sensationally as a younger son in a Victorian novel, Bryan stayed in Caux long enough to compete in the race, and then immediately came home, where he found that his father had been as good as his word. The door in Portland Place was closed to him, his job at the studio had been filled, and all his personal belongings crowded in forbidding confusion into a small room in the annexe of the Park Lane Hotel. He spent a dismal week sorting his possessions and writing short stories; the fact that he managed to sell one of the latter to a magazine did little to dispel his gloomy visions of a future in which his father, terrifyingly powerful in all the spheres in which he might hope to earn a living, was his declared enemy. At the end of a week, however, Jim, who had been driven almost to hysteria by the unbearable atmosphere of injury which Edgar was creating at home, prevailed on him to lift his ban on Bryan's presence at the studio, and a brief note to this effect was sent round by one of the servants. Bryan by this time had learned his lesson, and replied with a correct, dutiful and affectionate note expressing appreciation of his father's generosity; within an hour the valet

was back at his hotel, bearing a friendly and hand-written invitation to dinner.

He accordingly presented himself in Portland Place, where he found Edgar, Jim and Pat already at the table. Edgar, wrapped as usual in his dressing-gown, raised his eyes briefly and motioned him to a place, and after a moment of constrained silence asked him if he had enjoyed himself in Switzerland.

"Had a good time, did you?"

"Yes, thank you."

"Snow good?"

"Yes, quite."

"Anybody there I know?"

"Yes, So-and-so was there, and asked after you, and So-and-so sent his kind regards, and the hotel manager was very disappointed you weren't there."

"H'm." Edgar went on eating, staring at his plate. Then, turning to Jim, with that slight lifting of the eyelids which could be so formidable, "By the way, I've been thinking about the Lincoln Handicap, and I've got a shrewd idea . . ." Bryan's dramatic disinheritance (although, to his relief, he was not invited to return to Portland Place to live) was never mentioned again.

If the children saw him as unpredictable and sometimes alarming, Jim found the difficulty of dealing with his strange emotionalism disastrous to her nerves. He was more in love with her than he had ever been, and the fear that as he grew older he might be unable to hold her undivided affection encouraged his anxious possessiveness to the point of mania. He could scarcely bear her out of his sight, and as he became more and more of a stay-at-home, refusing even to visit the houses of his friends, and she became increasingly involved in the responsibilities of Wyndham's Theatre, his imagination built catastrophe out of her most trifling absence, and he declared

himself unable to work if he did not know precisely where she was and what she was doing. This morbid watchfulness had the nervous effect on Jim that might be expected; she fell into the apprehensive habit of telephoning him at all hours of the day to account for her movements, and at home occupied herself with tapestry work to keep her hands from trembling. Her disposition was a sociable one; she enjoyed her activities at the theatre, was an enthusiastic first-nighter, and took pleasure in social contacts with her many friends; but Edgar in his last two years had developed an unexpected misanthropy, and refused all invitations but those of Lady Hastings and Mrs. Mark Ostrer. It was impossible, without a complete renunciation of the life she enjoyed, for her to share Edgar's life as completely as he wished, and that life, since it was composed in his last two years almost entirely of overwork and emotional worry, was far from attractive. She never spared herself in either work or energy, and with almost superhuman discretion concealed from all but her most intimate friends the true state of affairs; but, since she knew that her husband's suspicions of her were not without foundation, her spirit quailed under the excessive weight of jealous love with which he burdened her.

His restlessness was a constant cause of anxiety. He would go down to Chalklands for a few days' work, leaving Jim in town, and within an hour of arriving decide that he could not bear to be alone, and would drive back to London without warning. The next day, disgruntled at finding her occupied at the theatre, as likely as not he would return in an aura of injury to the country. His movements between town and country house became impossible to predict, and a full staff of servants had to be maintained in both places. At week-ends Chalklands was usually crowded with guests, for, hating solitude, he loved to have his friends about him, and as soon as one party had left was busy arranging another; but it frequently happened that he would shut himself up in his study to work during the whole

time that they were there, and would complain irritably in private of the sound of tennis and voices coming up from the garden. His work, which still had the power to interest him, had become a tyranny from which there was no escape; the more money he earned, it seemed, the more he required, and health and temper were sacrificed to the necessity of keeping the machine working at full pressure. Occasionally he spoke wistfully of a book he intended to write—a book different from all his others, one which would live. "If ever I can afford to take six months off," he would say, "I shall write a book purely to please myself. If any book of mine lives, that will be the one." It was not to be a thriller, or even a novel, but a book on life as he saw it—"just life and people." He seems never to have had any clear conception of what this unwritten book would eventually be, but he fondled the idea and spoke of it lovingly, and occasionally gave his personal secretary, Miss Reissar, little scraps of hand-written description or conversation, with instructions to file them away against the longed-for six months when his masterpiece would be written.

He appears, indeed, in these last two years, to have found success insipid, or at least less rosy and satisfying than he had believed. It was a state, apparently, which required strenuous and unremitting effort to maintain, and he was learning the disillusion of slow exhaustion. Yet his energy was not allowed to flag, and the torrent of his output was as phenomenal as ever. The difference, now, was that emotional unrest had laid a wearying hand on him, and he had a dim suspicion that the pace had got to be kept up, if not increased, if he were not to find himself in serious financial trouble by the time he was sixty.

For forty years, now, there had been this steady and relentless acceleration, and it had reached a pitch where the delicate mechanism of brain and nerve was beginning to vibrate on a thin note of warning. The small flame of his genius had never

been allowed to burn steadily and in peace; it had been fluttered and blown upon by necessity, by spendthrift carelessness, by ambition and greed, until its strength was scattered and the flame itself noisy and uncertain. Genius there was, of a shallow and attractive order, but too much had been demanded of it; it had been spread as thin as varnish over the limitless surface of his work. This endless spinning out of the stuff of creation had been exhausting, but at the same time it had brought its own reward, for his genius, such as it was, had in the process cast its skin and been transformed. It had become, simply, a genius of achievement.

He must sometimes, even in this period of difficulty and indecision, have looked back incredulously to his beginnings, and have felt a stir of pride over the meteoric track he had left behind him—that track which faded as it receded through more than half a century, coming finally to rest, with a light no bigger than a glow-worm's, on a basket cradle on the floor of the Freemans' kitchen. He had had no help in the long and painful evolution, nothing but the creative spark alive in his own brain, and the dominating spirit which had fanned that spark until it had become first a thin, light flame of extraordinary brilliance, and then, under phenomenal pressure, had thrown up a great handful of gaudy and perishable stars. The conviction of his own possibilities had been with him even as a child, although, translated into childish terms, conviction then had seemed merely laziness, conceit, dissatisfaction. As a boy he had run through his many jobs as contemptuously as though they had been ha'pence, conscious always of the belief—now arrogant, now despairing—that there *must* be some better and finer life in store for him, some unknown world to which only his own ambition would find a key. Condemned to the scouring of milk-cans in Clara's scullery, had he not long ago angered Hanford by the imprudent assertion that his hands were never made for dirty work? Yet why not? What could a slum child of

the 'eighties, the unwanted by-blow of a shabby actress, expect? The answer was that he had expected everything.

He had been avid for life, and in his eagerness had had the strange belief that to him all things were possible. He had begun with nothing, and now, looking towards Hollywood as perhaps the last decisive step which he need ever take, he had everything that he had consciously demanded. Money, fame, power—they were all his. The only thing which in these last years had somehow failed him was personal happiness.

Leaving Jim and going to California was to be perhaps the last of those harsh and deliberate twists which he had given to his own fortune. He knew, as he had always known, that in a life like his nothing of importance could really be left to fate; success was achieved, or failure averted, only by the determined throw of his own hand. Forty years ago he had made a bid to escape from the drudgeries of labouring life by running away to sea. He had taken the same bold step when he had fled from the miseries of Clacton and joined the army. Again, when he left the army for precarious journalism. With *The Four Just Men*, a further abrupt step towards his slowly emerging goal, he had gambled, rashly and courageously, with more than he had ever had. So that going to Hollywood, stepping directly, at fifty-six, into an unknown field, must have seemed merely another wrench which must be deliberately given to his life's direction.

His success, dazzling in these last few years even beyond his own extravagant dreams, had given him a faith in the kindness of life which reason could never justify. It was to no kind fate, no indulgent providence that he owed the brilliant glitter of his unique position, but to the gift mysteriously born in him, to the facile imagination which charged every circumstance of life with superficial drama, to the confidence which drove that imagination, like a questing terrier, into every nook and cranny promising game. With all his arrogance he had been at the same time curiously humble. He had seen himself as a story-

teller; an entertainer; a literary mountebank, even, whose duty and pride were simply to please the public, and in the performance of this design no project had been despised provided only that it offered promise of success. He had turned his hand confidently to so many things that against his failures he could now, in middle age, set a world-wide and phenomenal achievement such as no other writer had ever known. Meretricious it might be, but it had been none the less real. It had been what he wanted.

He was an entertainer first and foremost, and even in the height of his fame had no inflated notion that he was anything else. He possessed the actor's temperament—mercurial, vain, confident and attractive. His achievements had a theatrical grandeur. His personality, rich and instantly perceptible as a great actor's, carried with it the vital need of an audience, a thirst for applause. Even his generosities were dramatically conceived, and performed with a grace and flair which Miss Marriott herself might have envied. Like her, like most actors, he desired power, and this lust—most difficult greed of all to live with, even when unallied to any sort of genius—had to a great degree proved the undoing of his domestic happiness. The aching need for power over those we love kills tolerance and makes compromise impossible, and eventually, in Edgar's case, it had eaten into the heart with the jealousy born of unconfessed defeat.

In such a state of mind, caught between financial necessity and the unhappy disquiet which was slowly unbalancing his emotions, Hollywood seemed both salvation and a species of nightmare. Go he must, for he could not afford to leave so promising a gold-field unexplored; he owed £20,000 in income tax alone, and had a hazy idea that freedom from debt would cost him nearly four times that figure. In the last few years his enormous income had somehow failed to keep pace with his insane extravagance. Extravagance itself had fascinated him

like a drug; if he had determined to make his name simply as the most reckless spendthrift of his generation he could scarcely have thrown his money from him with a more random hand. Racing losses which would have driven another man from the turf for ever, the vain expense of his own string of race-horses, improvident gambles in the theatre, obstinate disregard of his domestic expenditure (of which the move to the Carlton "for reasons of economy" is only an example) and fantastic generosities had combined to thrust him into a position of danger from which only his phenomenal earning capacity, coupled with drastic economy, could ever have saved him. And, as at every other period of his life, economy was the one solution which did not occur to him. How much money he needed he did not precisely know, and his old ability to shut his eyes to disagreeable truths prevented him from enquiring practically into the matter; but he knew that his situation was precarious, and that the possibilities of Hollywood could be ignored no longer. On the other hand, the thought of leaving Jim was a horror to him, and it was impossible for her to go with him, since Penelope was in a sanatorium, and in humanity he could not ask her mother to leave her. He consoled himself with optimistic plans for sending for both of them in a few months' time, when Penny should be strong enough for the 6,000-mile journey to California, and he himself successfully established in Hollywood.

As the day of departure approached he alternated between depression and excitement, and worked more feverishly than ever in an attempt to get his new play, *The Green Pack*, ready for Wyndham's and Gerald du Maurier before he sailed. He rejected Jim's prudent suggestion that he should go to a doctor for a thorough physical examination with the impatience which he always expressed towards professional medical advice. He insisted that his recent and recurring attacks of bronchitis meant nothing; his chest had been a bit touchy, perhaps, in

these last few years, but that was nothing new; in any case he knew perfectly well how to look after himself. In this he was wrong, for he had no suspicion of the disease which was sapping his strength—the *diabetes mellitus* which he had fed for years with incessant drinking of sweet tea, and which already was exaggerating his insatiable thirst and his inhuman pallor. So far as he knew, his tendency to bronchitis was his only weakness, and even then he did not guess how, by years of self-cosseting, he had encouraged this trivial delicacy of the chest. He feared cold and draughts, and consequently fresh air, and went to extreme measures to protect himself against them. The room he worked in was invariably overheated, and the heavy glass screen which surrounded his desk was really little less than a three-sided cabin. He travelled habitually in a closed car; his windows were kept shut in all but the warmest weather, and he wore two sets of underwear under his padded dressing-gown. This lack of fresh air occasionally troubled his conscience, but he refused to take any normal means of rectifying it. Exercise he abhorred, and could never be prevailed upon even to walk in the garden at Chalklands; the only concession he would make to Jim's insistent protests was the purchase of an expensive little electric machine which was supposed to generate ozone, and which, after a few trial runs in the study, was abandoned as a nuisance and comfortably forgotten in a cupboard.

His stoutness worried him increasingly in his last years, but in this, too, physical lethargy defeated all resolution. A quarter-mile path specially laid down at Chalklands for the purpose of a daily walk was never once used, and schemes of diet and exercise were always abortive. On one occasion, seduced by the advertisement of a patent gymnastic apparatus, he had had one installed, and had called in the inventor to demonstrate his new method of achieving the maximum result with a minimum of exertion; but after a few days any excuse was sufficient to deter him from using it—pressure of work, a wet morning, a headache



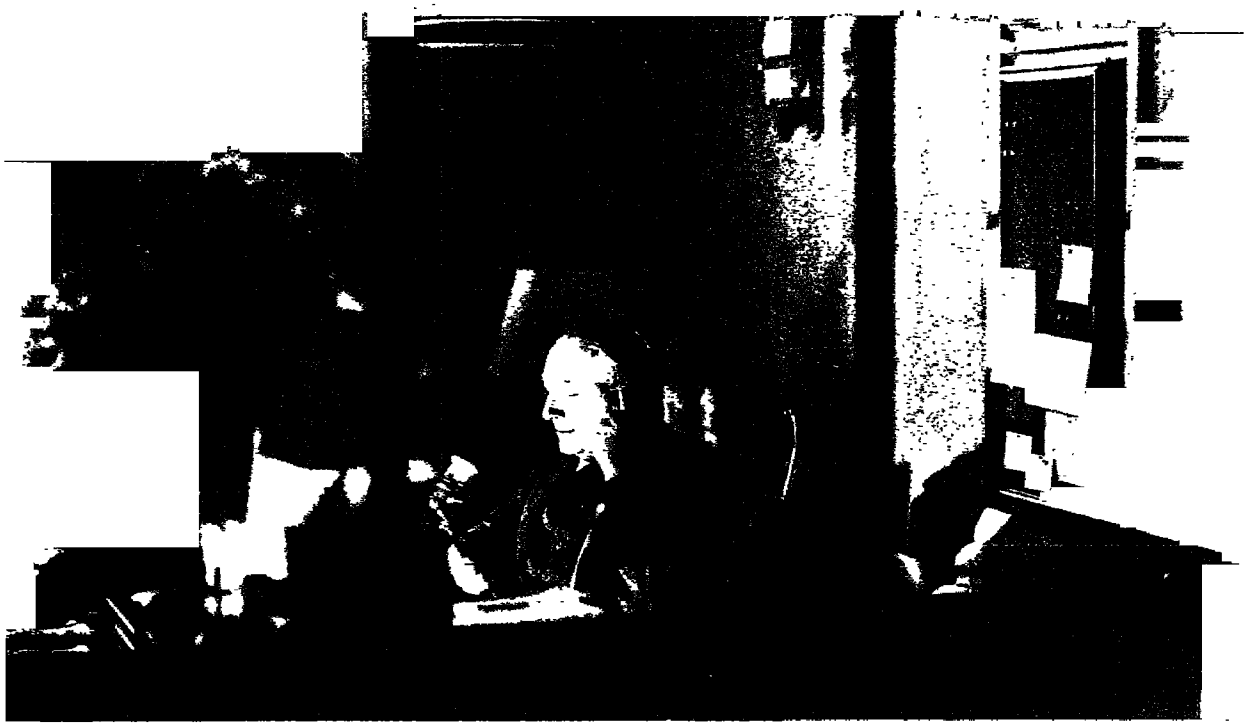
Jim and Penelope.



that slight lifting of the eyelids which could be so



Chalklands, Bourne End.
"He would shut himself up in his study . . .'



"The heavy glass screen which surrounded his desk was really little less than a three-sided cabin."

—and the patent contraption of wires and pulleys was soon keeping company in the cupboard with the disgraced ozone generator.

One of the attractions of California to which Edgar sincerely looked forward was the much-advertised beauty of the climate. He hated the gloom and damp of the English winter, and promised himself an unusual freedom from his tiresome colds. When Penny's tubercular trouble had been cured Jim would be able to bring her out, and she, too, would benefit from the sunshine; and if all went well (as who could doubt that it would?) in the spring Pat and Michael should join him in Hollywood. Already, rejecting the hated thought of solitude, he was surrounding himself in imagination with his own family, and fortifying himself against the parting with rosy hopes of speedy success and an even speedier reunion. A parting of any kind was painful to him, and when it was he himself who was going to a new country, where he knew no one, he was anxious to slur over the moment of farewell as unobtrusively as possible. For this reason Jim was not permitted to see him off, and only Willie Blackwood of all his Fleet Street friends was on the platform of Waterloo Station to say good-bye. With no definite farewells, and with the promise to telephone to his wife as soon as he was on board, he could slip away from England as though the 6,000-mile journey were of no importance, and as if it were only a matter of days before he turned towards home.

He sailed in the *Empress of Britain* on November 21st, 1931, a cold, grey, gloomy day which made cheerfulness difficult. Bob Curtis, his efficient secretary, accompanied him, and a young man called Robert Downs, who had become his valet. The ship was leaving on a long cruise, in which New York was to be the second port of call, and in an attempt to introduce an air of festivity into what promised to be a somewhat wintry and desolate occasion a band was playing on deck and stewards were distributing paper streamers among the passengers.

Edgar, taking his last look at England, could no longer see Pat and Bryan among the crowd, but he accepted the coloured streamer which the steward put into his hand, and after a moment of hesitation took out his pen and scribbled on the end of it: "Good-bye—Edgar Wallace." Then he threw the little coil of paper at random and went to his cabin. Before the ship was well out of the Solent he was already writing to Jim: "It is rather sad going away—sadder than anybody knows—and more unreal than any sailing I have ever made, with paper streamers being thrown from the upper deck to the quay . . ."

The five days of the crossing were intended to be a rest, but by the second day he was hard at work in his state-room. "My intention when I started was to do at least sufficient work to pay my passage," he wrote to Jim in the third of the long series of letters which, in their regularity and fullness of detail, bear a strong resemblance to the "Diary of a Parting" with which he had cheered Ivy more than thirty years before, "and I think I have just about done that. (Small stuff: articles, etc.)" He was also revising his new play, *The Green Pack*, which Gerald du Maurier had agreed to produce at Wyndham's, himself playing the lead. "I think I shall change the play so as to make it less real and more theatrical. After all, people want to be pleased and not harrowed; so the lady must be altered, though I am afraid I cannot make her respectable. . . . We did some more work yesterday, and I think I have just about paid my passage. It is the first time I have ever worked on a ship, and although I haven't written the story I intended writing, and haven't even rewritten the play, I have done enough to amuse me without giving me any unusual fatigue." The amount of work which he considered "enough to amuse" him, however, shows that the voyage was anything but idle. "Between S'ton and Cherbourg I wrote an article for Sinclair. My record since last Monday week . . . is one novel length story, one 20,000 word story, one 3-act play" (*The Green Pack*), "one scenario re-

written, 16 articles, one broadcast (there is something else which I can't remember)."

Except for his daily walk round the deck and three visits to the ship's cinema he worked throughout the five days of the crossing, keeping Robert Downs on duty, as usual, into the small hours to brew him tea. He slept a little each day after lunch, and employed what time was left in writing his diary to Jim. His anxiety to succeed in Hollywood was touched with unaccustomed diffidence. "It is going to be very interesting to discover the attitude of R.K.O., which I shall find out when I get to New York. . . . On their attitude depends the length of my stay in America. I will do a very full two months for them; at the end of that time they have either got to be ecstatically pleased or I shall be homeward bound. I am like that . . . I am certainly not going to rush back if I find I am doing the job right. It wouldn't be fair to you to go there with the absolute intention of returning at the end of two months. A lot will depend on how I go here." The parting would only be worth while if he could return with honour.

At New York, where the R.K.O. contract was to be signed, he was met by his agent, Carl Brandt, and interviewed by about thirty ship-news reporters who had come on board at Quarantine. He was pleased with his reception, and in spite of the fact that he had developed a catarrhal sore throat (which he was "battling with the inhalant") managed to summon the full charm of his public personality for a long series of interviews. Privately, however, the signing of the contract carried a feeling of irrevocability which was not altogether pleasant, for he had been nursing an unconfessed hope that at the last minute R.K.O. would change their minds, and that he would be able to turn round with the ship and join Jim and the children for Christmas in Switzerland. "I had my plans made if the deal had fallen through; I was coming back on the *Empress of Britain* to Madeira, Gibraltar and Monte Carlo, and going on from Monte

Carlo overland to Caux. However, that happy development belongs to the legion of dreams, and when the *Empress of Britain* sails I shall be well on my way to Hollywood."

He worked again on the train, breaking his journey only for a few days at Chicago, and watched the flat wintry landscape with a melancholy eye. He was nursing a slight cold, and comforted himself by wearing soft leather boots, lined with sheepskin, into which Robert carefully tucked the legs of his trousers. At Los Angeles he was met by more newspaper reporters and photographers, and posed on the steps of the train as he was expected to do, exhibiting his long cigarette-holder. Then he drove to the Beverly-Wilshire Hotel, and, with a characteristic eagerness to get to work as quickly as possible, immediately tried to get in touch with the studio. He had arrived, however, on a Friday night, when the studios were closed, and had to contain his impatience until the following morning.

On Saturday he met the R.K.O. executives, was given a secretary and a room in "the block where the executive writers are kept chained up," and told that they wanted him to write a "horror picture." "I believe if I get past with my quick work," he wrote to Jim, "I shall make a lot of money, always providing they don't get scared by the very rapidity of the work." But Hollywood, apparently, was more than a match for his facility, and stories which he turned out in a few days were mysteriously absorbed into a maze of offices and departments from which it was almost impossible to elicit reports. Scenarios demanded at a moment's notice were passed maddeningly from hand to hand among people who seemingly never had time to read them, and at the end of the first few weeks he had decided in despair that "in some ways it is rather like living in a madhouse."

The hotel, though comfortable, was not a congenial place to work in, and, more important still, it seemed impossible to

obtain a drinkable cup of tea. The faithful Robert had tried to remedy this deficiency by going down to the service pantry and making it himself, but as Edgar demanded tea at all hours of the day and night this unorthodox practice was soon severely discouraged. Hotel life, besides, made him more than usually homesick; and in an attempt to recapture the domestic atmosphere that he so painfully missed he began to consider renting a furnished house. He had been delighted to find Guy Bolton, the playwright, in Hollywood, and was interested to discover that he had "a most charming house at a fairly low rent, furnished"; Mrs. Bolton was asked if she could find him just such another. Accordingly, after some searching, a furnished house was decided on in North Maple Drive, Beverly Hills, at a rent of $350 a month, and Edgar moved in with Curtis, Robert, a Japanese gardener and a coloured cook.

The house suited him very well, for it was roomy and pleasantly furnished, and possessed a garden full of sub-tropical flowers whose names he conscientiously listed in his letters. He could now, moreover, have tea made for him every half-hour while he was working, and could entertain his new friends to supper parties which were at least a shadow of his favourite gatherings at Portland Place. For the first time in many years he began to go out freely, and allow himself to be entertained—a change which was due less to a sudden desire for social life than to increasing loneliness. He was, in fact, as homesick as a child, and filled his letters to Jim with hopes and plans for her coming to California, painstakingly going into such detail as to tell her where she should break her journey, what trains to catch and even what clothes to wear. As Christmas approached, he anxiously followed her journey to Switzerland with the aid of a time-table, making careful calculations of the difference between American and European time. "By the time I am having my dinner to-night at eight o'clock you will have left Vallorbe and before I go to bed you

will be in Caux." It reassured him to be able to picture her in a definite place at a definite time, making a familiar journey through country that he knew: such imaginings made it almost seem that he was sharing the journey to Switzerland, and soothed the insistent nag of jealous worry. He telephoned frequently from Hollywood, reckoning nine minutes of reassuring conversation well worth the £20 they cost him, and more comforting than any number of letters. He telephoned to Caux on Christmas Eve and again at the New Year. On Christmas Day he refused all invitations, and, melancholy with the thought that this was the first Christmas he had spent away from his family for more than ten years, passed the evening alone. He was still a little at a loss in his new surroundings, and found Christmas in Hollywood rowdy and unfamiliar. Even the weather was unseasonable; fog and rain had blotted out the sunshine, and the nights were surprisingly cold. "I am still sleeping remarkably well," he wrote to Jim, "and though I had a little chest, due to going out in the cold when I was hot, that has practically passed off." In a few weeks' time, when *The Green Pack* was safely launched at Wyndham's and Penny was well enough to travel, the weather, he assured her, would be glorious. He amused himself with planning a welcoming party.

The Green Pack, meanwhile, was going into rehearsal in London, and du Maurier was finding disturbing evidence of the haste in which it had been written. Certain alterations of characterisation and plot seemed necessary before the play could be considered safe, and Gerald, who had no wish to be involved in one of Edgar's nonchalant failures, made suggestions to Jim which she relayed by cable to Hollywood. Edgar, harassed by the labour and frustration of his studio work, and no more amenable to criticism in Hollywood than anywhere else, lost his temper completely, and replied with a cable which Jim's past experience of his moods must have

robbed at least of the element of surprise: "SUGGESTED CHANGE DOCTORS WIFE AND END GROTESQUE FANTASTICAL STOP CANNOT RISK HAVING PLAY RUINED BY ILL CONSIDERED WHIMSICALITIES STOP SUGGEST ABANDON PRODUCTION UNTIL MAY LET THEATRE GO DARK RICHARD." A second cable followed a few minutes later. "FURTHER TO MY PREVIOUS WIRE FEEL THAT BOTH YOU AND GERALD READ AND LIKED PLAY NOW ELEVENTH HOUR WANT WHOLE PLOT AND MOTIVES CHANGED STOP FEEL PERFECTLY HELPLESS ABOUT IT RATHER NOT PRODUCE UNLESS ON LINE WRITTEN STOP DONT MIND INTERPOLATING SCENES BUT CANNOT POSSIBLY RECONSTRUCT PLAY AT THIS DISTANCE." "Fury"—to quote Jim herself—"had given place to despair"—which was the normal sequence of Edgar's emotions when his work had been criticised. The third stage, if he ran true to form, would be grudging acquiescence, and sure enough a third cable followed on the heels of the second, warning her that he would telephone her at Wyndham's that night at eleven. By the time the call came through he was considerably calmer, and agreed almost amiably to the suggested alterations; the fourth and last stage, workmanlike co-operation, was achieved within the next few days, and the changes in situation and dialogue were cabled from Hollywood. "Don't ever get rattled," he wrote to Jim when this outburst was over, "—even when I go off the deep end. The only thing that matters is happiness, and especially your happiness, and what the hell does it matter what happens at the theatre?" The emotional cycle was complete: he was shamefaced, affectionate and penitent.

Early in January his old friends Steve Donoghue and Michael Beary arrived in Hollywood, and, the talk turning not unnaturally to racing, they decided to pay a week-end visit to Agua Caliente, over the Mexican border, and enjoy its twin attractions of race-course and casino. The two jockeys travelled together and Edgar drove down with the Boltons, having previously arranged to meet in time for the first race on the

Saturday. It was Edgar's first taste of racing since he had left England, and his spirits rose jubilantly as the car headed south. He had fulfilled more than half of his two months' contract, his work (in spite of the "madhouse" atmosphere) was being well received, he had heard encouraging news of the rehearsals at Wyndham's, and Jim had actually booked a provisional passage for February 24th. He was feeling sufficiently confident, now, to formulate ambitions of directing a picture of his own before he left Hollywood, and he intended to make full use of his new experience in making a film at British Lion in April, in which Bryan could assist him. Everything, after all, was turning out for the best; in the pleasant company of the Boltons and Michael Beary the chill of homesickness and loneliness could be shaken off, and he was able to go to Agua Caliente in a frame of mind which promised a maximum of enjoyment.

On arriving at the race-course he was astonished and delighted to find that the second most important race of the day had been called the Edgar Wallace Stakes in his honour, and that he himself had been appointed an extra steward. And as if to complete the pleasant surprises of this auspicious day he and Mrs. Bolton together picked three winners while sitting comfortably in their box, while Guy Bolton and Michael Beary made elaborate and (in the case of the jockey) professional inspections in the paddock before every race, and were uniformly unlucky. Altogether it was a most successful expedition, and provided what were probably the happiest two days of Edgar's brief sojourn in America. One is glad to know that his last experience of the only sport he loved was made memorable by success, by the society of friends, and by public honour, and that he never dreamed that he had looked his last on racing when he turned his back contentedly on Agua Caliente.

Back in Hollywood after this brief respite, he began to wonder anxiously whether his contract, of which only another fortnight



Hollywood: working on a scenario.

remained to run, would be renewed. "Most of to-day," he wrote to Jim, "has been taken up by chasing round to discover whether they are going to renew my contract. As you know, it is for eight weeks with an option for a further eight weeks at a higher rate. The trouble is, apparently, that they are having wild fits of economy, and there is just a possibility that they may not on that account take up the option." His doubt was the result of a worrying uncertainty as to whether or not the company were satisfied with his work. He himself seems to have been somewhat disappointed with the executives' response, for, as he wrote in one of his letters, "the truth is that in these seven weeks I have not had a chance of proving myself, and that is what I was most anxious to have." As early as the middle of December he had nursed a hope that the scenario on which he was then engaged would be made a vehicle for a major star, and that he himself might even be allowed to direct it. "My ambition," he wrote in his letter-diary, "which may not be realised, is that the film I have made, roughly designed for Constance Bennett, will be directed by me. There is a possibility, of course, that as she is such an important and expensive star they may choose one of the better known directors. But that's my secret ambition, and I whisper it into your ear so that I may have all the sympathy if it doesn't come off." And now it had, indeed, failed to come off; another story had been chosen for the star, and he had to comfort himself with the knowledge that he was "learning a tremendous lot of what is regarded in motion pictures, not only the angles but the interests that the public want," and that when he came home he would be able to give British Lion "a real rip-snorter."

His "horror picture," a story of prehistoric monsters in which he was now busily engaged in collaboration with Merion Cooper, one of the executive writers of R.K.O., was interesting him deeply, and he was hoping that the promising progress of this picture (which was eventually titled *King Kong* and com-

pleted after his death) would influence the studio handsomely in his favour. "I shall do my best to get another contract," he wrote, "and that is why I am being so very careful about the present picture I am writing and directing because I want to have two ends to my contract." In this he was not disappointed. The option was taken up and a new contract for a further two months signed on the last day of January. He began to feel that Guy Bolton had spoken no more than the truth when he had told Michael Beary that Edgar was "the biggest success among the writers that had come out here. So," he concluded, retailing this gratifying scrap of gossip to his wife, "you see what you've got!" The idea of returning to England with honour was constantly before him.

The Green Pack was due to open at Wyndham's on February 9th, and Edgar, his confidence in du Maurier's judgment fully restored, was looking forward to an almost certain success. He had hit on a scheme for establishing personal contact with his first-night audience which was calculated to give as much delight to himself as publicity to the play, and was arranging to broadcast to the theatre from Hollywood before the rise of the curtain. The novelty of the scheme, and the surprise in store for the audience, touched the boyish part of his imagination, and he referred to it excitedly in his letters. His only anxiety was that, having caught a slight cold, his voice on the first night might be unpleasantly husky. "Two windows in my bedroom were left open last night," he wrote on February 3rd, "and I woke at five with a distinct chest—the wind was east and that's the way my bedroom faces. So I'm up feeling very sleepy and having no inclination to work. When you come out will you bring some Greenish's mixture?" And the following day—"I really have got a cold—sneezed quite openly to-night. The throat is not sore—it is sort of throat-conscious . . ."

He decided to hold his own *Green Pack* party on February 6th,

so as to run no risk of interfering with his broadcast on the first night itself, and both by letter and telephone gave Jim a detailed description of this modest celebration. His guests—a doctor and his wife and a handful of minor film celebrities—had met at his house for cocktails, and the party had then gone on to the Embassy Club for supper. It had been an interesting though not spectacular evening, and he spent some time the following day (which was a Sunday, and the eve of the dress rehearsal of *The Green Pack*) in writing down an account of such scraps of conversation as he thought might interest Jim, together with the dashing detail that he had not got home until three o'clock in the morning. In this he had earned the mild disapproval of Robert by carrying his overcoat home instead of wearing it; the night had been extremely cold and he had spent the evening in a crowded and heated atmosphere.

That evening he was expecting a single guest to dinner, and as he had a slight headache (which he not unnaturally believed to be a result of his party) he did no work, but spent the whole day in writing letters. His study, as usual, was kept at an uncomfortably warm temperature; a log fire and two electric heaters were burning, and the windows were closed. The hot-house atmosphere in which he loved to work was a source of some discomfort to his servants, and Robert in particular had obtained permission to appear without his coat when he was waiting on Edgar alone in the stifling study. On this particular day the room seemed more than usually close, and as the morning wore on he complained of the increasing violence of his headache. It was, he said, the worst headache he could remember, and sent Robert to a nearby drugstore to buy all the patent remedies which the druggist recommended. Apart from the disagreeable pain, he was anxious to get rid of his headache by evening so that he could appear at his best; the young actress who had promised to dine with him had inspired in him an extraordinarily youthful enthusiasm during these last few

weeks; they were enjoying one of those sudden friendships of which the chief charm lies in their unexpected and romantic flavour, and he was looking forward to her visit with undisguised pleasure. He had said little of this new acquaintance in his letters to Jim, for the prudent reason that however innocent the friendship might be, it was yet sufficiently intense to have run the risk of rousing her suspicion, and since he was counting the days until Jim's arrival he had no desire to take the bloom off their meeting by questions and explanations. That he could, while so deeply absorbed in his jealous love for Jim, which at times was so violent as to seem like a species of hate, fall into a romantic frame of mind concerning another woman, is perhaps not so inconsistent as it at first appears. He had always had the ability to concentrate on the enjoyment of the moment, keeping past and future conveniently out of sight; and he was, moreover, deeply and emotionally lonely. There is not the smallest doubt that the moment Jim set foot in Hollywood his present romantic excitement would have dropped into the background and have been dismissed from his mind; but Jim's arrival was more than a fortnight away, and he hated solitude. He was permitting himself, in the meantime, the luxury of feeling all the anxious suspense about his visitor that would scarcely have been out of place if he had been a young man in love.

She had dined at his house several times in the company of friends, and once or twice when, beside themselves, only Curtis had been present; on this Sunday evening he had invited no other guests. In the hope of curing his headache before she came he dosed himself with half a dozen different remedies between luncheon and five o'clock, and spent part of the afternoon lying in his darkened bedroom, having left instructions with Robert that he was to be called immediately if the lady telephoned. At five o'clock she sent a message of regret that she would be unable to dine, but would call at his

house for a few moments after dinner. Edgar ate his dinner alone, wearing his dressing-gown, smoking heavily during the meal and swallowing a reckless quantity of aspirin. Although the pain in his head was now even more violent than before, he refused to go to bed, but wandered restlessly about his hot room, listening for the door-bell and the telephone. At ten o'clock Robert was sent over to the lady's house to see if she had returned, but was unable to bring any news of her; and at eleven Edgar, now plunged in melancholy, announced that he was going to bed, and instructed Robert to call him if he heard her car.

Shortly before midnight Robert, who had been reading in the kitchen, made his final round of the house to lock windows and doors, and was surprised to find the front door wide open and a cold wind blowing in. He stepped outside, and was alarmed to see Edgar, clad in his silk dressing-gown, pacing up and down the side-walk in front of the house, apparently watching for a car. He immediately offered to bring out his master's overcoat, since the night was extremely cold; but Edgar answered him abruptly, saying that he was too hot already, and refusing the offer of the coat. As he did not come in Robert eventually, and reluctantly, went to bed.

At five o'clock the next morning Edgar's bell rang urgently, and Robert, accustomed to these early summonses, went to his room. The room was in darkness, and the valet heard his master mumble something which he took to be a request for tea; he also heard the noise of splashing in the bathroom. He turned on the light and found that Edgar had apparently tried to ease his headache during the night with a cloth wrung out in cold water, and that he had dropped the cloth back in the basin and left the tap running, with the result that the bathroom was flooded. He fetched a bucket, mopped up the water as best he could, and then went back to the kitchen to make tea.

Finding that Edgar was apparently unable to raise himself he supported him with his arm and held the cup to his lips, but quickly perceived from his confused mumbling that his master was seriously ill, and seemed, indeed, delirious. Alarmed, he woke Curtis, who telephoned Dr. E. C. Fishbaugh, a physician well known in Hollywood, who promised to be at the house by nine o'clock. Edgar meanwhile appeared to have fallen into a doze, and there was nothing to do but wait.

Shortly before the doctor arrived a pre-arranged telephone call to Jim came through, and Edgar was wakened and the receiver put into his hand. Curtis, however, quickly saw that he was incapable of speaking coherently, and took the receiver himself, telling Jim as reassuringly as he could that Mr. Wallace had a headache, and would probably telephone later. Jim, preparing to go down to Wyndham's for the final dress rehearsal, became alarmed, and before she went into the theatre sent a cable to Edgar begging him to tell her what was the matter.

Meanwhile the doctor had arrived, and after a lengthy examination and making several tests diagnosed sugar diabetes, and, since the patient was in a coma, hurriedly called in another doctor and summoned two nurses. He questioned Robert closely concerning Edgar's previous health and diet, and shook his head gravely over the admission that for years he had been in the habit of drinking abnormal quantities of heavily sweetened tea. A third doctor, an osteopath who had given Edgar treatment for his cold a few days before, was now called in, and Curtis cabled cautiously to Jim that Mr. Wallace had a slight temperature, but that he hoped shortly to be able to send her a favourable report. By four o'clock, however, it became alarmingly evident that double pneumonia had set in, and in the evening the doctor considered it necessary to administer oxygen.

After the oxygen he rallied, and for two hours remained conscious and comparatively normal. Surprised at finding

himself packed in wadding, with two pairs of flannel pyjamas and a coat, he asked with alarm whether he were going to die, and, on being reassured, begged plaintively that Jim should be told that he was ill. Curtis cabled her immediately, and the following morning Jim, torn between her anxiety to leave at once and her feeling of responsibility for the first night of the play, replied that she would leave in the *Majestic* as soon as it was over.

The first night of *The Green Pack* was a melancholy occasion even for the audience, for by this time the newspapers had got hold of the story, and contents-bills announcing "EDGAR WALLACE GRAVELY ILL" were posted at the entrance to the theatre. Her anxiety and du Maurier's, moreover, seemed to have communicated itself to every part of the house.

The following day, when Jim was on her way to Southampton, Edgar relapsed into a coma, with increasingly rare periods of consciousness. During these he seemed obsessed with the idea of getting up from his bed; the fear of death was constantly before him, and he had a pathetic illusion that if only he could put on his slippers and dressing-gown and drink one more cup of tea, he would surely be well. To humour him Robert brought the dressing-gown and slippers and put them on him as he lay; and the doctor, realising, perhaps, that he had reached the stage where this longed-for indulgence could no longer hurt him, allowed Robert to grant his whispered request for a cup of tea. Comforted, he lay still, and gradually fell into an unconsciousness deeper, but no less gentle, than a natural sleep. He had understood that Jim was on her way, and now, wearing the slippers and dressing-gown in which he had worked so long, and with his cup of tea at his side, he seemed content to wait. These ordinary things had comforted him, and he was afraid no longer.

In the small hours Robert, asleep with his head on the kitchen table, was roused by Curtis, and told that the end was near.

Walter Huston,[1] who had become an affectionate friend during these last weeks in Hollywood, had been waiting in the house for many hours, and now had been called upstairs. Robert and Curtis joined him in the bedroom, and for nearly three hours sat at the bedside of the sleeping man. None of them was aware of the gentle moment when that quiet sleep became death.

* * * * *

"We had no idea," Mr. Huston afterwards wrote to Bryan, "that the end would come so soon. From about two o'clock in the afternoon he lost consciousness. The only thing he said during the time that I was at the house Tuesday morning was to ask Robert for a cup of tea. He made no remarks to anyone. . . . The last hour was very peaceful and very quiet. The two hours preceding the last hour he had convulsions which lasted about a half-minute at first, with intervals of five to ten minutes, and grew longer until they were lasting two or three minutes. Understand, he never knew anything about these, and the doctor said they were brought about by cerebral hæmorrhages. The doctor also had another condition to fight—a diabetic one. This was a surprise to us all . . . He understood Tuesday morning before he went into a complete coma that Mrs. Wallace was coming, and signified merely by nodding his head . . ."

Jim's anxious coming, however, had been cut short by a cable from Curtis which had reached her while the *Majestic* was still within sight of Southampton, and she had perforce to complete the crossing to Cherbourg in the misery of knowing that Edgar was already dead. Even the elements conspired to make that crossing terrible, for a wintry storm was raging in the Channel, and when the liner reached Cherbourg the seas were too heavy to allow her to enter the harbour. Jim was put ashore in a tender, which, in the confusion of darkness, snow and violent seas collided with a German steamer in the harbour mouth, so

[1] The film actor

that the handful of passengers in the tender clung to the sides in terror. By the time she reached Southampton the following day, shivering and exhausted, Edgar, too, had begun his journey home.

Robert had dressed him in his favourite suit, with the gold cuff-links Jim had given him, and—loving and understanding choice—his Press Club tie. He had lain in state in a little memorial chapel in Los Angeles, where his friends had looked their last on him, and now the coffin, watched by Robert and Curtis, was on its way to New York.

He was carried on board the *Berengaria*, the ship in which he had already hoped to return when his work in Hollywood should be done. They laid a Union Jack over him, and covered him with flowers. He lay alone in the empty saloon under his burden of wreaths, and no journey that he had ever taken had been made in such quiet dignity and state.

When the ship crept into Southampton Water her flag was flying at half-mast, and the flags of Southampton slipped gently down to salute him. The bells of Fleet Street tolled, and Wyndham's was dark. It was to honour, though not as he knew it, that he had indeed come home.

THE END

APPENDIX

Settlement of Edgar Wallace's Estate

ON Edgar Wallace's death in February, 1932, it was found that the total claims of his creditors amounted to £140,000, and that his liquid assets were practically nil.

He had willed three-sevenths of his estate to his wife, and one-seventh to each of his four children; but, in the circumstances, his widow found herself left without ready money, and with an estate burdened with liabilities to the extent of £140,000.

On the action of a creditor the estate was administered in Chancery, and the court, in the winter of 1932, directed an enquiry into the creditors' claims. This enquiry revealed a complicated state of affairs, since Edgar Wallace had in 1927 formed a limited private company registered as R.H.E. Wallace Ltd., to which he had, presumably in the hope of reducing his income tax, assigned all his copyrights for the period of his lifetime.

He himself was managing-director of this company, and his family were the only shareholders, so that, apart from his director's fees, his income for the last five years of his life had not been legally his own. He had, however, drawn £58,000 more than was due to him, which produced the curious result that R.H.E. Wallace Ltd. was his principal creditor.

Against this £58,000 which the personal estate of Edgar Wallace owed to the company was balanced £50,000 which Wyndham's Theatre claimed for the unfulfilled remainder of the theatre lease. R.H.E. Wallace Ltd. was legally the lessee of the theatre, but the rent had been personally guaranteed by Edgar Wallace, and the estate of Edgar Wallace deceased was

(since R.H.E. Wallace Ltd. possessed heavy liabilities and no assets) consequently liable.

Income-tax claims amounted to about £21,000, of which £17,000 was due from R.H.E. Wallace Ltd., and £4,000 (mostly surtax) from the personal estate. Tradesmen's accounts amounted to about £8,000, and there were various other claims bringing the total liabilities up to the round figure of £140,000. There were no racing debts, since Edgar Wallace's bookmakers' accounts had, following the usual practice, been settled weekly.

Nine months after her husband's death Mrs. Wallace, on the advice of Sir Patrick Hastings, K.C., put the financial affairs of the estate in the hands of Mr. Theodore Goddard, the solicitor, with a view to forming a new company, Edgar Wallace Ltd., to deal with the settlement of the estate.

Before this new company could be formed, however, the claims of the creditors had got to be met, and the first step towards settlement was the reduction of the total claims from £140,000 to £64,000—a result which was achieved by contesting a number of the claims, and by legal argument.

The Wyndham's Theatre claim was reduced to £30,000; the R.H.E. Wallace Ltd. claim was legally disputed; and the difference between the two counter-claims decided on as £10,000, which the personal estate still owed to the company.

The enquiry directed by the court occupied a year, at the end of which (nearly two years after Edgar Wallace's death) about £26,000 in royalties had come in, and, being paid into court, was available for distribution to the creditors. The position now was—liabilities, £64,000; assets, £26,000, plus future royalties.

Mr. Theodore Goddard in the course of the next few months persuaded the principal creditors to reduce their proved claims for the sake of immediate settlement, and all of them (with the exception of Wyndham's Theatre) were eventually satisfied out

of the £26,000 which had been paid into court since Edgar Wallace's death. All tradesmen's accounts were paid in full. A large claim on the remainder of the Portland Place lease was settled for £2,775, and the Commissioners of Inland Revenue agreed to reduce their claim.

Wyndham's Theatre accepted £6,000 in cash and £6,000 in debentures in the new company of Edgar Wallace Ltd., which was about to be formed. These debentures were fully redeemed by the new company within two years.

The result, for which credit is principally due to Mr. Theodore Goddard, and to Sir Patrick Hastings as a private adviser, was that by March, 1934—exactly two years and one month after Edgar Wallace's death—all the creditors were satisfied and the estate settled. There remained now only to form the new company of Edgar Wallace Ltd., which was registered in May of the same year.

In this private company Edgar Wallace's four children, Bryan, Patricia, Michael and Penelope, were made sole shareholders, their holdings being in proportion to the provisions made for them by their father's will. Mrs. Wallace, however, had survived her husband by only fourteen months, and in her will had left her own three-sevenths to her only child, Penelope; so that Penelope held four-sevenths of the company's shares, and the three elder children one-seventh each.

At the end of its second year the new company of Edgar Wallace Ltd., the sole assets of which are the Edgar Wallace copyrights, was free of all liabilities and was paying dividends.

INDEX

Admirable Carfew, The, 290
An African Millionaire, 175, 275
Angel Esquire, 223
Anstee, Mr. and Mrs. Fred, vii, 32–33, 54, 77, 79, 80, 99, 100, 110, 118–9, 125, 163, 172
Answers, 260, 282, 297
Athenæum, The, 129

Barrie, P. C. ("Ringer"), vii, 304, 305, 306, 307
Beary, Michael, 403, 404, 406
Beaverbrook, Lord, 241
Beech, George, 222
Bennett, Arnold, 252
Bibury's Weekly, 233, 242 *f.n.*
Binstead, Arthur M., 251, 253
Birmingham Daily Post, 253, 254, 260
Blackwood, Wilnie, vii, 254, 260, 281, 282, 286, 296, 297, 298, 397
Blair, Mary Jane, *see* Marie (Polly) Richards
Boer War, The (a short history of events leading up to and of the Boer War), 108–160
Boer War, The Great, by A. Conan Doyle, 115 *f.n.*, 125 *f.n.*
Bolton. Guy, 401, 403, 404, 406
Bolton, Mrs. Guy, viii, 401, 403, 404
Bones, 228, 289
Book of All-Power, The, 295
Books of Bart, The, 291
Brandt, Carl, 399
British Lion Film Corporation, 358, 359, 374, 384, 387, 404, 405
Brooks, J. Elliott, viii
Bruce, Nigel, 320, 336, 338
Bryan, William Jennings, 170, 171
Bucks Mail, The, 373, 374
Burleigh, Bennett, 120, 242

CALDECOTT, Ivy (afterwards Mrs. Edgar Wallace), 88–93, 101 *et seq.* 125, 131, 134, 143 *et seq.*, 217, 218, 220, 221, 222, 230, 231, 232, 249, 250, 255, 257 *et seq.*, 303, 310, 311, 312, 313, 370, 371, 385, 398
Caldecott, Mrs. (Marion, mother of Ivy), 78–92, 93, 94, 95, 99, 102, 104, 105, 106, 107, 143, 158, 185, 267
Caldecott, Rev. William Shaw (Ivy's father), 78–92, 98, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 143, 194, 227, 267, 313
Calendar, The, 320, 328, 333, 334, 335, 336, 337, 338, 339, 342, 343, 360, 368
Cape Mercury, The, 102
Cape Times, 93, 95, 96, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 106, 179
Capone, Al, 340, 341
Captain Tatham of Tatham Island, 223, 290
Captains of Souls, 291
Cardwell, Mrs., vii
Carrington, Gen. Sir Frederick, 122, 123, 124
Carson, Sir Edward, 204
Case of the Frightened Lady, The, 320, 353, 360
Cassidy, L. F., viii, 220, 221, 228, 230, 233, 242, 251
Chandler, Miss Blanche Wills, 253 *f.n.*
Chicago Daily News, 298
Chick, 291, 359
Christ Church, Bermondsey, Temperance Society, 38
Chattaway, Edward, vii
Churchill, Winston, 120–1
Clauson, Mr. Justice, 333, 334
Clue of the New Pin, The, 359
Cockle, Edie, 50, 54, 55, 56, 57, 65, 68, 72, 80, 104, 105, 125, 126, 217, 218
Cockle, Miss Nelly, vii
Cohen, Cæsar, 153, 156
Cohen, Harry Freeman, 153, 158, 162, 164, 165, 166, 171
Cohen, Lionel, vii
Council of Justice, The, 223

Collard, Lieutenant B. St. George, 206, 207, 208, 215
Connaught, Duke of, 67–68
Country Life, 120
Cowley, John, vii, 232, 241
Crimson Circle, The, 288, 289
Crippen, Dr., 234, 235, 236, 237, 238, 239
Curtis, Robert, 255, 256, 258, 271, 272, 280, 285, 286, 301, 330, 341, 362, 365, 366, 378, 383, 397, 400, 401, 408, 410, 411, 412, 413
Curzon, Frank, 368 *f.n.*

Daily Chronicle, 102, 128, 135
Daily Mail, The, 122, 129 *et seq.*, 222, 229, 232, 254, 279, 348, 362, 371
Daily Mail Library, staff, vii
Daily Mirror, The, 188, 241
Daily News, 122, 132, 139, 140, 209, 373
Daily Sketch, 247
Daily Telegraph, The, 137 *f.n.*, 156, 287
Dark Eyes of London, The, 289, 293
Daughters of the Night, 272
Davis, Lt.-Col. Newnham, 251
Day of Uniting, The, 291
de Courville, Albert, vii, 233, 234, 244, 247, 255, 260, 273, 274
Derby, Lord, 299, 300
Devil Man, The, 291, 356
Dewsbury District News, 127
Donoghue, Steve, 403
Donovan, Miss Grace, vii, 170, 264
Doran, George, 339, 340
Down Under Donovan, 290
Downs, Robert, viii, 397, 399, 401, 407, 408, 409, 410, 411, 412, 413
Doyle, Sir Arthur Conan, 115, 125, 349
Dramisto Ltd., 369
Duke in the Suburbs, The, 223
du Maurier, Sir Gerald, 313, 314, 319, 320, 322, 328, 333, 334, 336, 338, 367, 395, 398, 402, 403, 406, 411

Eastern Press, 108
East London Daily Dispatch, 101, 149
Edgar, Marriott, vii
Edgar, Miss Grace, 7, 9, 11, 12
Edgar, Mrs. Adeline, vii, 7, 9, 11, 12
Edgar, Richard Horatio, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 321
Edgar, Robert, 8
Edgar Wallace, by His Wife, 254 *f.n.*, 256 *f.n.*
Educated Evans, 289, 290, 306, 307
Edwards, E. J., vii
Elmore, Belle, 235
Elson, Anita, 273
Empire Magazine, 252 *f.n.*
Enthoven, Mrs. Gabrielle, vii
Erskine-Bolst, Captain C. C., 378, 379, 382
Evans, Walter, J. vii, 173
Evening News, The, 102, 129, 173, 174, 176, 183, 188, 232, 233, 238, 383
Evening Standard, The, 241
Evening Times, The, 232 *et seq.*, 251, 362

Falk, Bernard, vii, 232, 235, 241
Famous Scottish Regiments, 255 *f.n.*
Field-Marshal Sir John French and His Campaigns, 255 *f.n.*
Findon, Arthur, vii, 232, 235, 236, 237
Fish, W. G., vii
Fishbaugh, Dr. E. C., 410, 412
Flying Fifty-Five, The, 290
Flying Squad, The, 331, 335, 353, 356, 359
Forger, The, 359
Four Just Men, The, 184, 185, 187, 188, 190, 191, 194, 197, 216, 217, 222, 237, 243, 271, 297, 393
Fourth Plague, The, 244
Freeman, Clara, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 31, 46, 47, 58, 125, 126, 195, 218, 370, 392
Freeman, Dick, name given to Edgar Wallace
Freemans, The, 18–35, 58, 99, 125, 126, 169, 172, 195, 307, 361, 392
Frisbys, The, 34–35, 125, 127

Gamman, Rev. H. S., vii, 212, 213, 224
Garrett, Edmund, 96, 98, 100
Gay, Maisie, 273, 274, 352
George, Lloyd, 374, 378, 380
Gibbs, Sir Philip, 167
Goddard, Theodore, viii, 415, 416
Goldflam, Lewis, 336, 337, 338, 339
Grand Magazine, 271
Green Archer, The, 289
Green Pack, The, 395, 398, 402, 406, 407, 411

Greenwich Theatre, 3, 4, 13, 14, 15, 16
Grey Timothy, 244, 290
Growns, Mr., vii
Growns, Mrs., 56, 59
Gunner, The, 289
Gwynne, H. A., vii, 108, 109, 116, 117, 118, 122, 145, 229, 363

HAMILTON, Miss Cicely, 357 *f.n.*
Hands, Charlie, 167, 195, 242
Hanford, Harry, 47–58, 126, 392
Hannan, Ben, vii, 70–71
Hansard, B. M., 242 *f.n.*
Hardie, Keir, 53, 54
Harker, Gordon, 320, 335, 336, 353
Harmsworth, Sir Alfred (afterwards Lord Northcliffe, *which see*), 159, 171, 173, 174, 189, 190, 192, 195, 197, 198, 201, 202, 203, 205, 214, 215, 216, 241
Hastings, Lady, viii, 390
Hastings, Sir Patrick, vii, 338, 345, 355, 356, 415, 416
Hellier, Benjamin, 84
Hello, Exchange, 234
Hepple, Mrs. Julia, vii
Heroes All: Gallant Deeds of the War, 255 *f.n.*
Hewett, R. S., vii
Hewett Fishing Company, 44
Hirst, Miss Laurie, vii, 130, 131, 132
Hirsts, The, 128, 130, 133
Hodder & Stoughton, 280, 283, 284, 288, 301, 354
Hodder-Williams, Sir Ernest, 280, 281, 283, 284, 287, 288, 321, 322, 354, 355, 356
Hodder-Williams, Ralph, vii, 283, 354, 365
Hore-Belisha, Rt. Hon. Leslie, vii
Hughes-Onslow, Henry, 262–3
Hulton, Edward, 246, 247, 248, 249
Hurley, Mrs. Constance, vii
Hurran, Miss E., vii
Huston, Walter, 412
Hutchinson, & Co., 143 *f.n.*, 254 *f.n.*, 256 *f.n.*
Hutchison, Miss Emma, 168
Hyde, Sir Charles, 253

Ideas, 223, 228, 246, 247, 248
In and Out of Fleet Street, by B. M. Hansard, 242 *f.n.*
India Rubber Men, The, 293

JANET, *see* Thornton-Smith, Florence
Jim, *see* King, Miss Violet
Jockey Club, The, 333, 334, 336, 338
John Bull, 304
Johnston, Sir Harry, 213, 224, 225

Karroo Farmer, 108, 109
Kean, Charles, 7
King By Night, A, 289, 293
King Kong, 405
King, Violet ("Vivette": "Jim": afterwards Mrs. Edgar Wallace), 256 *et seq.*, 297 *et seq.*, 327 *et seq.*
Kipling, Rudyard, 93, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 137, 149
Kitchener, Lord, 141, 142, 144, 145, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152, 154, 155, 156, 157, 159, 253
Kitchener's Army and the Territorial Forces, 255 *f.n.*
Knight, E. F., 120
Kruger, 73, 74, 95, 108, 109, 125, 161

Lad, The, 331, 332
Laughton, Charles, 342, 343
Lawrence, Mrs. Cora, 251
Lawrence, Vincent, vii, 251, 252, 253
Leonard, Billy, vii, 273, 274
Lever Brothers, 202, 203, 204, 205
Lever, Mr. (later Lord Leverhulme), 201, 202
Levy, J. Langley, vii
Linnit, Bill, 332, 383
Linnit, S. E., vii, 368
Lloyd's Weekly News, 360
London Mail, 313, 314, 349
Long, John, 354
Loraine, Robert, 325, 326, 327, 328, 329, 379
Loraine, Mrs. Robert, viii
Lowenthal, Mr., 69
Lucky Fool, by L. C. Gould-Flème, 336–339

MACKINNON, Mr. Justice, 338
Macready, W. C., 7
M.A.P., 149
Man From Morocco, The, 289, 294, 295
Man Who Changed His Name, The, 324, 325, 326, 327, 328, 331, 359
Man Who Knew, The, 295
Man Who Was Nobody, The, 295
Man With Red Hair, The, 342
Manager's Dream, The, 234

Manchester Evening News, 272
Manchester Guardian, The, 129
Marlowe, Thomas, 132–133, 134, 166, 167, 170
Marriott, Miss Alice, 5–17, 321, 394
Marshall, J. G., vii
Martin, Col C. D., vii
Massingham, H. W., 136
Merson, Billy, 331, 332
Methuen, Lieut.-Gen. Lord, 110, 114, 116, 117, 118, 119, 127, 144
Methuen & Co., 125, 130
Meyer, Bertie, 323
Midland News, 108, 109
Million Dollar Story, The, 295
Milner, Sir Alfred (afterwards Lord Milner), 80, 108, 153, 155, 164, 166–7
Mission That Failed, The, 102, 118, 126
Modern Germanies, by Miss Cicely Hamilton, 357 *f.n.*
Morel, E. D., 209, 214
Morning Post, The, 363, 364
Morrison, Captain J. A., 240
Morrison, Jack, 273
Mouthpiece, The, 343, 344, 345
M'Lady, 278, 279, 280, 313

Neilson-Terry, Denis, 323
Newnes, George, Ltd., 243, 255
News Chronicle, 380
News of the World, The, 187, 329, 355
Newton, Arthur, 235, 236, 237, 238, 239
Newton, H. Chance, 8
Northcliffe, Lord (*see also* Sir Alfred Harmsworth), 241, 297, 371
Northing Tramp, The, 291

O'Connor, T. P., 149
Old Man, The, 352, 353
On the Spot, 320, 328, 339, 341, 343
Orator, The, 289, 357
Ostrer, Mrs. Mark, vii, 390
Outlanders, by C. E. Vulliamy, 115 *f.n.*, 137 *f.n.*
Owers, George, vii
Owl, The, 95, 98, 100, 102

Pall Mall Gazette, 102
Penny Mail, The, 103
Penstone, Mrs., 95, 100, 102
People, 355, 358
Pierre, 265, 266, 267
Pinder, Sergeant R., vii, 75–77, 95
Police Journal, 307
Power, Hartley, 327
Press Club, vii, 168, 174, 222, 285, 298, 299, 300, 301, 371, 413
Press Club Bulletin, 242
Prew, Robert, vii
Pringle, Thomas, 81, 82
Private Selby, 243

Racing Up to Date, 229
Radio-Keith-Orpheum Studios, 376, 384, 399, 400, 405
Raisuli (Moroccan brigand), 175, 176, 177, 178
Ramsey, Willie J., vii, 38–42
Rand Daily Mail, The, 158, 161, 164, 173, 216
Rawson, Admiral, 94
Rayne, Leonard, 163, 168, 175, 178, 179
Red Aces, 359
R. E. Walton's Weekly, 233
Reddin's Road Board School, 28–29
Red Rubber, by E. D. Morel, 209, 210
Reissar, Miss Jenia, viii, 341, 342, 365, 391
Reuters, 109, 116, 118, 119, 122, 123, 126, 132, 133, 134, 144, 229
Rhodes, Cecil, 100, 113, 116, 128, 164, 175
Richards, Josephine (Joey), 10, 13, 14, 31, 168
Richards, Marie (Polly), 4–17, 23, 24, 25, 168–9, 204 *f.n.*, 321
Richardson, J. Hall, vii
Riddell, Lord, 355
Ringer, The, 315, 319, 320, 321, 322, 323, 325, 353, 358, 359, 365, 368
River of Stars, The, 244
Roberts, Arthur, 65, 67, 68, 69, 321
Robinson, Mrs. Clara, vii (*see also* Clara Freeman)

Sadler's Wells, 8
St. John Ambulance Brigade, 39
Samuel, Lady, 373
Sanders, Horace, vii, 300 *f.n.*
Sanders of the River, 94, 226, 234, 242, 260, 281, 289
Saturday Evening Post, 275
Saturday Review, The, 129
Saxon-Mills, Miss Grace, viii

Scott, Sir Samuel, 239
Shanks, Edward, 355
Shaw, Reeves, vii
Shurey's Publications, 222, 260
Simonstown, 74–102
Smith, F. E. (later Lord Birkenhead), 204
Smith, S. W., vii, 384
Smith-Dorrien, Gen. Sir Horace, 254
Smithy, 142, 181, 222, 228, 251, 252, 289
Smoky Cell, 345, 346, 347
South African Journal of Commerce, 108
South African Review, 102
Sporting Times, The, 250
Squeaker, The, 324, 328, 329, 331, 332, 353, 360, 366, 368
Standard, The, 128, 229
Standard History of the War, 255 *f.n.*
Standard Theatre (Shoreditch), 8
Standard and Diggers' News, 158, 161
Star, The, 128, 238, 246, 354, 362
Steevens, G. W., 120
Story Journal, The, 246
Story of a Fatal Peace, The, 255 *f.n.*
Strand Magazine, 271, 355
Sunday Dispatch, The, 241
Sunday Graphic, 361
Sunday News, 347, 350, 351, 353, 360, 361, 374
Surrey Theatre, 8
Sutton, Sir George, Bart., vii
Swaffer, Hannen, vii, 338, 347, 348

TALBOT, Haydon, 256 *f.n.*
Tallis Press, The, 185, 190, 191, 196, 197
Tam o' the Scouts, 255
Taylor, Jenny, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17
Tempest, Marie, 367
Terror Keep, 289
Terror, The, 323, 325
Thomson's Weekly News, 260
Thorne, Mrs. Isabel, vii, 222, 223, 224, 225, 227, 228
Thornton-Smith, Florence ("Janet"), 183, 184, 185, 189, 191, 192, 193, 195, 219
Three Oaks Mystery, 277
Times, The, 204, 279, 352
Times History of the War in South Africa, 123 *f.n.*, 148 *f.n.*
Town Topics, 250, 251, 252, 253, 255, 260
Unofficial Despatches, 140 *f.n.*, 143 *f.n.*

Valley of Ghosts., The, 359
Vivette, *see* King, Miss Violet
Vlakfontein atrocities, 138, 146–7, 148 *f.n*
Vulliamy, C. E., 115 *f.n.*, 137 *f n.*

WALLACE, Bryan, viii, 175, 218, 231, 244, 249, 255, 261, 265, 266, 267, 269, 277, 309, 310, 312, 339, 340, 345, 366, 370, 387, 388, 389, 398, 404, 412, 414, 416
Wallace, Edgar, *see* Wallace, Richard Horatio Edgar
Wallace, Edgar, Ltd., 416
Wallace, Eleanor Clare Hellier (Edgar Wallace's first child), 158, 164
Wallace, Ivy Maude (Mrs. Edgar Wallace, *nee* Ivy Caldecott, *which see*)
Wallace, Michael Blair, 264, 266, 267, 270, 309, 310, 339, 397, 414, 416,
Wallace, Patricia Marion Caldecott (Pat), viii, 217, 218, 231, 244, 249, 255, 261, 266, 267, 269, 276, 277, 305, 309, 310, 312, 339, 366, 367, 370, 374, 377, 381, 389, 397, 398, 414, 416
Wallace, Penelope, 310, 330, 339, 377, 387, 395, 397, 402, 414, 416
Wallace, Richard Horatio Edgar, 15, (birth) 16, 17, (early years with the Freemans) 18–35, (his first job) 36–37, (various employment) 38–43, (cook aboard a trawler) 44–45, (milk roundsman) 47–53, (militiaman) 55, (army recruit) 59–72, (South Africa and the Caldecotts) 73–92, (early writings) 93–110, (Reuter's correspondent) 110–126, (to England on leave) 126–132, (back to South Africa as *Daily Mail* correspondent) 134, (evading Kitchener's censorship, Boer War) 144–160, (South African editor, opulence, dismissal and debts) 161–6, (home, reporter *Daily Mail*) 167, (visit of Mother) 169, (temporary editor) 174, (failure of first play) 180, (*Four Just Men*) 184–90, (publishing worries) 190–3, (Harmsworth to rescue) 198, (two libels; dismissal) 204–15, (not wanted in Fleet Street) 216, (his third child

born) 217, (depths of depression) 219, (*Sanders of the River*) 226, (Fleet Street again) 229, (racing prophet) 232–3, (Crippen confession) 234–9, (*Evening Times* collapse) 240–2, (publicity story-writing) 245, (with Hulton) 246–8, (his children) 249, (the war and reduced salaries) 251, (wartime journalism) 254, (Violet King) 256–9, (moving pictures) 261–2, (special constable) 262–3, (birth of second son) 264, (divorce) 266, (E. W., Tea Drinker) 272, (revue and the stage) 273–5, (second marriage) 277, (*M'Lady*, a failure) 278–80, (quantity writing) 281–8, (plot construction) 288–92, (characters) 293–4, (each new story his best) 296, (chairman of Press Club) 299–301, (race horse owner and box at Ascot) 301–4, (petty crooks) 306–9, (another daughter born) 310, (death of Ivy) 312, (successful playwright) 319–23, (play producer) 325–9, ("Jim," theatrical manager) 329–31, (a lawsuit) 333–4, (another lawsuit) 337–9, ("ghosts") 339, (to America) 339–41, (his best play) 341–3, (Wyndham's) 346–7, (spiritualism) 348–50, (failures) 352, (killing pace of production) 354–7, (film making) 358–60, (much income, little capital) 364, (spectacular living, racing and theatre losses, dramatic generosity) 366–72, (Parliamentary candidate) 373–4, (tempting offer from Hollywood) 376, (electioneering campaign) 377–83, (financial troubles, temper and hysteria) 384–91, (in retrospect) 392–4, (income *v.* extravagance) 394–5, (Hollywood) 397–409, (Hollywood, taken ill and dies) 410–2, ("It was to honour that he had indeed come home") 413, (settlement of his estate) 414–6
Wallace, R. H. E., Ltd., 414, 415
Wallace, Violet (Mrs. Edgar Wallace, *née* Violet King, *which see*)
Wallace, Walter (comedian), 16
Wallace's Blackpool Banner, 378, 379
Ward, Lock & Co., 244, 255 271
Waterlow, Sons & Layton, 42
Watney, Charles, 228, 232, 237, 241
Watt, A. S., vii, 280, 301, 356
Week-end, The, 232, 233, 242
Week-end Racing Supplement, The, 233, 234
Weekly Tale-Teller, The, 222, 223, 224, 226, 228, 234
Whirligig, The, 273, 274, 352
White, Sir George, 108, 113
Whiteface, 360
Williams, Emlyn, 342, 353
Wilson, A. E., vii, 246, 247, 248, 273
Wood, Mrs. John, vii
Writ in Barracks, 126, 127
Wylie, Julian, 324
Wyndham's Theatre, 414, 415, 416

Yellow Mask, The, 324, 331
Yes and No, 222

A list of the novels, stories, plays and film scenarios of EDGAR WALLACE mentioned:—

The Admirable Carfew: An African Millionaire: Angel Esquire: Bones: The Book of All Power: The Books of Bart: The Calendar: Captain Tatham of Tatham Island: Captains of Souls: The Case of the Frightened Lady: Chick: The Clue of the New Pin: The Council of Justice: The Crimson Circle: The Dark Eyes of London: Daughters of the Night: The Day of Uniting: The Devil Man: Down Under Donovan: The Duke in the Suburbs: Educated Evans: Famous Scottish Regiments: Field-Marshal Sir John French and His Campaigns: The Flying Fifty-Five: The Flying Squad: The Forger: The Four Just Men: The Fourth Plague: The Green Archer: The Green Pack: Grey Timothy: The Gunner: Hello, Exchange: Heroes All, Gallant Deeds of the War: The India Rubber Men: A King by Night: King Kong: Kitchener's Army and

the Territorial Forces: The Lad: The Man from Morocco: The Man Who Changed His Name: The Man Who Knew: The Man Who was Nobody: The Manager's Dream: The Million Dollar Story: The Mission that Failed: The Mouthpiece: M'Lady: The Northing Tramp: The Old Man: On the Spot: The Orator: People: Private Selby: Red Aces: The Ringer: The River of Stars: Sanders of the River: Smithy: Smoky Cell: The Squeaker: Standard History of the War: The Story of a Fatal Peace: Tam o' the Scouts: Terror Keep: The Terror: Three Oaks Mystery: Unofficial Despatches: The Valley of Ghosts: The Whirligig: Whiteface: Writ in Barracks: The Yellow Mask